MEDIÆVAL SICILY

CECILIA WÆRN

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Waern (Cecilia)—**Mediæval Sicily**: Aspects of Life and Craft. Social, artistic, and economic life in Sicily under the Saracen domination, and during the later rule of the Normans, Hauteville, and Roger Guiscard, containing an interesting picture of the personalities and policy of the Court of Palermo, the status of the peasant, dances, folk-songs, and survivals, changes of language, and a minute survey of the architecture, sculpture, and ornament of the churches, palaces, and cathedrals of Palermo, Cefalu, Syracuse, Monreale, etc., supplemented throughout by extracts from the early travellers, Ibn Haugual, Edrisa, Falcandus, and others. Bibliography and index, with 74 full-page plates of typical examples of architecture, sculpture, and crafts, with some general views. Roy 8vo, cloth, edges uncut, pp. xxxii, 354 (pub £1 net) London, 1910

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EDIÆVAL SICILY

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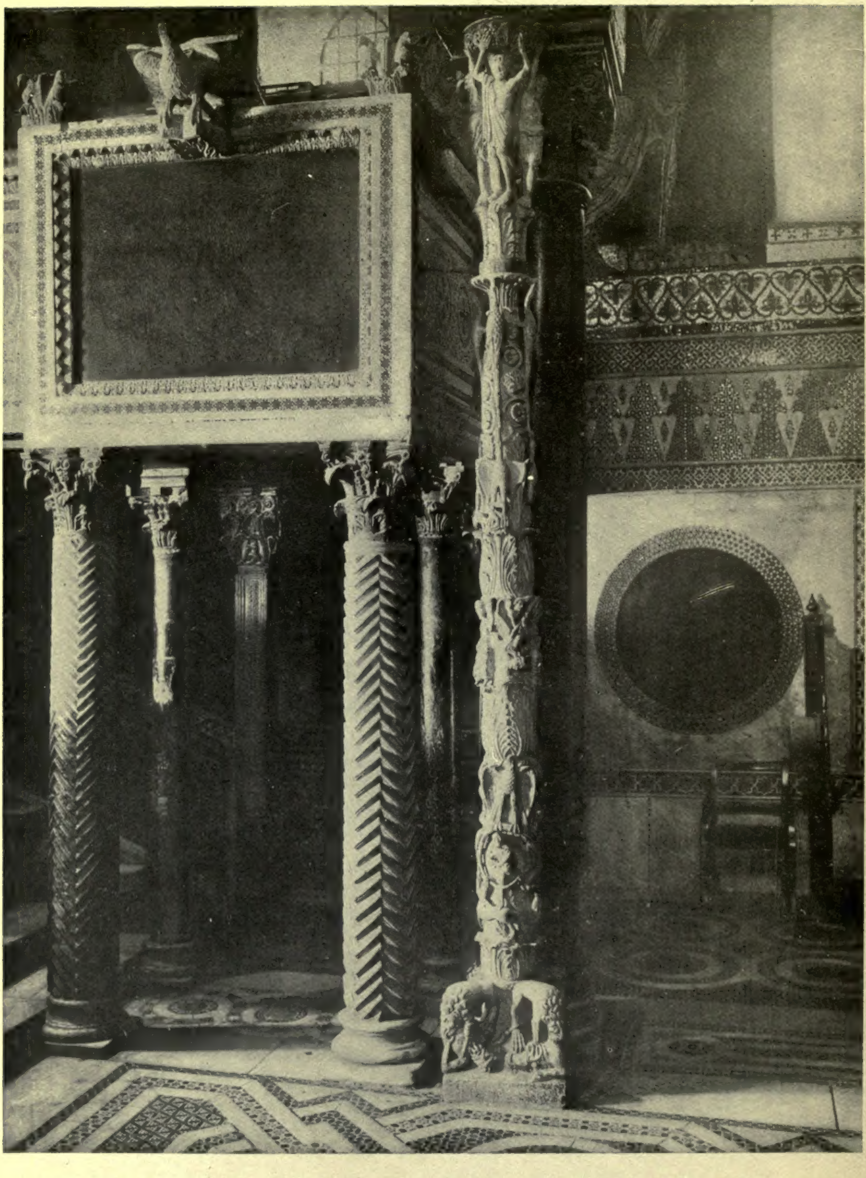

PULPIT AND PASCHAL CANDLESTICK, CAPPELLA PALATINA, PALERMO

Incorpora, Palermo *Frontispiece*

MEDIÆVAL SICILY

ASPECTS OF LIFE AND ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES

BY CECILIA WÆRN

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TO
MY FRIEND
DR. GIUSEPPE PITRÈ

PREFACE

THE soul of wit is brevity—especially in the title of a book—probably also in the preface. But when the title is misleading, by very reason of its brevity, the temptation to write some kind of a preface becomes irresistible.

The full title of this book should be "Some Aspects of Life and Craft in Mediæval Sicily." It does not profess to be a student's manual, giving neat and well-ordered information about all the principal institutions of Mediæval Sicily, and still less a tourists' handbook, supplying the dates, formulæ and labels that they generally delight in. It would fain be taken, rather, as a bundle of short essays, arranged in chronological sequence, with just enough general information to supply a sense of continuity, dealing with certain aspects that have interested the writer personally and seemed to her those most important for a deeper understanding and a full enjoyment of a stay in the lovely island, incomparable for attractiveness and charm.

Aspects, chiefly, it will be seen, of the outward and visible kind. But are they not the most obvious? Those which it behoves us first of all to try to realise? Would we not have been spared a good deal of the vapid talk of the late generation of dilettantes, about Dante and Botticelli, their Ideals and their Souls, if these dilettante craft had been freighted with some little knowledge of their *milieu* before embarking on the perilous sea of comment?

There is abundant material for the study of the social history of Sicily, far more, indeed, than I have been able to make use of here. This is fortunate. The history of art as the most important manifestation of culture is everywhere conditioned by the surroundings, but nowhere more obviously and picturesquely so than in Sicily during the brief period of brilliant efflorescence. We are doubly fortunate in having contemporary descriptions handed down to us, vividly descriptive, full of mediæval freshness of vision and naïveté of expression, yet written by highly cultivated men, learned Jews, keenly observant Arabs, and talented Italians. Readers will be grateful to me, I am sure, for devoting a large proportion of the space available—even at the cost of certain sacrifices in other directions—to long extracts from the principal of these, given in unbroken continuity if somewhat abridged, so as to preserve at least something of the fine flavour of the original.

The Arabic accounts have been translated by me from Amari's Italian version in his admirable collection "La Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula"—which has rendered accessible so much invaluable material. For ibn Jubair I have also made use of Schiaparelli's later more critical version. Some passages will doubtless bear another interpretation than the one arrived at by this double process of translation, but as they are not used to prove any special point, this may perhaps be considered a minor matter, all the more that Mr. G. D. Hornblower has kindly translated the passage describing the Royal Palace direct from the Arabic for me, thus adding greatly to the scholarly value of my book.

For the history of Social Life, there are also some recent books or pamphlets, mentioned in the Bibliography; there is, further, all the matter collected in Amari's brilliant and learned "Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia"; in the Codes of Custom; in the Cartularies, or Collections of Documents published of late years; or lurking in the twenty odd volumes of the "Archivio Storico Siciliano," or in that hard-worked mine, so full of unexpected information with regard to private life, the late Vincenzo di Giovanni's "La Topografia Antica di Palermo."

PREFACE

The literature regarding the topography and street life of Palermo is extraordinarily rich. It is as if the peculiar living fascination of this unique city had always made itself felt, again and again leading writers, dazzled foreigners as well as ardent patriots, to dwell on the features of the fair. In the sixteenth century, and later, when there was a Revival of Learning in Sicily as elsewhere, this bent has occasioned a whole series of delightful descriptive publications.

The old lie of the land, or rather of the sea, has preoccupied the minds of the learned ever since the Revival of Learning, when some (obscure) passages in Polibius, in Diodorus, and in Procopius gave rise to the rather picturesque and therefore attractive assumption that the old Palæopolis, or Qasr, or inner City was (until Norman times) surrounded by two long arms of the sea. Several reconstructive plans have been published on the basis of this supposition, from 1614 onwards. In the nineteenth century two eminent Germans, Schubring and Holm, took up the question —and one of them, Schubring, even published a plan, less conjectural than preceding ones, but still incorrect, taking no notice of the important testimony brought to light by the publication of the description of ibn Hauqal (given here in chapter ii.).

This purely local and learned question would be without value for English readers of a book of general interest were it not for the fact that the current literature about Palermo, especially in English, is still in the early transition stage between old assertions and new research, when the old assertions tend to become dogmas and create much confusion.

And it must be admitted that the great work of V. di Giovanni, "La Topografia Antica di Palermo," is one of the least accessible of learned works. It is a collection of papers read before learned bodies, of the very rambling and diffuse kind, yet full of critical acumen and withal excellent in method. This method has consisted in hunting through the archives for *all* mentions and notices of a topographical nature, and especially for all mediæval documents with precise topographical indications, such as they occur in deeds of gift or sale or endowment, and carefully comparing all these with the famous, much-discussed passages in mediæval writers, or with later descriptions, written before certain monuments or aspects had disappeared. Incidentally these two ponderous volumes are therefore also a perfect mine of information about things mediæval.

My own chapter on the mediæval aspect of Palermo (in which, writing, as I hope, for the many and not for the learned few, I have tried to steer clear of all learned shoals) is mainly the outcome of patient digging in this hard-worked mine, preceded and supplemented by prowls on my own account and collateral reading. I have also had the inestimable advantage of not one, but many, topographical explorations and discussions with my friend Dr. Giuseppe Pitrè, the social historian and folklorist.

To the same kind and learned friend—never failing in either knowledge or kindliness—I also owe the use I have been able to make of the all-important evidence of survivals. To the invaluable aid offered by his books (*see* the Bibliography) there has in my case been added the privilege of long talks full of *vivâ voce* information.

The evidence of "survivals" is nowhere a better guide to ancient conditions than in countries like Sicily. Life was until recently full of survivals everywhere, even in Northern Europe, but it takes the learning of a Frazer or a Mannhardt to recognise old primitive conceptions, once crystallised in beautiful classical myths in, say, certain rather uncouth harvest customs of Northern lands.

In countries like Sicily the old love of these Southerners for outward manifestations (in due time and season), the strong formal bent of the race, have combined with the inheritance of two old and ripe civilisations, themselves full of crystallised survivals and formal observances, in producing survivals of the most strikingly picturesque quality; some easily recognisable as such by all with the slightest tinge of classical knowledge. If, for instance, one finds the vintage on Mt. Etna still showing many of the traits of the old Greek Bacchanal, one is justified in assuming that these modern vintage customs are a survival of the old classical Bacchanalian observances, and in drawing the further inference, as I have done here, that there was no break in continuity, that the "men from Calabria," who in 1196 were called in on good conditions to found and cultivate the agricultural village of Mesepe near Paternò, on the very slopes of Mt. Etna, and the "down-trodden serfs" of other regions, for a few days threw aside all their sordid cares and dull plodding patience, and joined heart and soul in the licentious fun.

Yet the break-up has begun in Sicily as elsewhere, due to the slow undercurrent of several well-known causes, slower and more insidious, probably, in Sicily than elsewhere. Take the influence of the returning emigrants, for instance. The Sicilians are passionately attached to their native place, and their great hope and ambition, when they emigrate, is to scrape and save, and send home enough money to be able to come back and settle as landowners or contract farmers. They do not want to revolutionise like the Northerners,* either socially or economically. Sicilian economists generally deplore the fact that nearly all the considerable sums of money that from "the Americas" find their way to Sicily, are nearly always invested in land in the complicated unprogressive Sicilian way, and not in big industrial undertakings. The returning Sicilian emigrant is as a rule not an innovator. His ambition is, on the contrary, to settle down to "respectable" life in the grooves of the life of a class, the *galantuomini*, a step or two above his own. People of this stamp do not innovate. But their sons and daughters do, more or less, even in conservative Sicily, and still more influence must be ascribed to the knowledge emanating from them that good *braccianti* (day labourers) in America are paid—as the miners are—fifteen francs a day, while the pay of a day labourer in country districts in Sicily is about one franc a day.

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* About ten or twelve years ago, the present writer actually witnessed the death of the Maypole, in a country place in Sweden. In Old Sweden the gaily decked Maypole is, or was, set up on Midsummer Eve, and people dance round, it the twilight night, the brisk national "polska" or the characteristic "ring dance," in which young and old join hands and dance round the pole. Fires are, or were, also burnt on the hill-tops. As modern round dances grew in favour, dancing "floors" were in many places erected to keep these passionate dancers out of mischief on Saturday nights. One Midsummer Eve, when "the gentry" came to join in the fun, lo! there was no Maypole! The daughters of the bailiff, who had seen life in America, had decreed that it no longer served any purpose and had diverted the decorative instinct of the maidens to the decking out of the dancing floor, which was decorated with garlands and sapling birches (the old instinct of tree worship is still ineradicable, and people still feel the same mystic thrill of pleasure at the sight of the tender green of sapling birches round the porch on Midsummer Eve as they do at the sight of the cut firs set up in the snow outside the front door, and the many lit candles indoors on Christmas Eve)—but also with festoons of little lamps, suggestive of Coney Island.

In Sicily, as elsewhere, the old order changeth, yet is still on the whole unchanged. An all-round Sociologist (with the requisite knowledge of Sicilian) who was neither blinded by Socialist sympathies to the value and existence of other issues, nor deluded by sentiment for local colour *à tout prix*, would there find a profoundly interesting state of things. While the old survives in remarkable miracle plays performed for the people by the people on rough "stages" (*estrades*) in the open air such as the one I had the good fortune to witness at Scicli, and in other picturesque phenomena described in the last chapter of my book; while Sicily is still profoundly mediæval in religious observances, rites, manners, and customs and modes of thought; enforced military service brings all the young men in contact with others, and does away with absolute illiteracy even in districts with miserable schools. Socialist propaganda is spreading and a good deal of "noble discontent" with their intolerable lot is beginning to pervade the masses. My own observations in this direction were to me only a side issue, yet it seems to me that one impression that I received was significant. It was at Paternò, a rural town on the slopes of Mt. Etna, where the one hotel consisted of two rooms on a top floor, reasonably clean as to the middle of the tiled floor, but full of "survivals" of generations of busy spiders between shutters and wall. Arriving late, I was up betimes looking out of the window. It overlooked a countrified square with one large marble slab for the sale of fish, and a fountain; and beyond this a short street of some half-dozen low houses ending in the fields. Doors were open and grave men were solemnly mounting their mules, to ride out to their work in distant fields. Others came riding down the street from the town, one after another, never in twos, silent, sombre, inscrutable, immovable on their mules in the morning light, looking as if they were accomplishing some solemn rite, or were part of the immemorial past. Yet as we drove down the quiet main street, deserted now that the men had all gone to their work and the women were still busy indoors, I noticed not less than three shabby signboards over closed doors, denoting that here was the club-room of some Socialist league or association or other.

In another town, still farther inland, noticing that there were none of these signboards, and knowing something by that time about the poverty and hard lot of the peasantry, I asked a good observer if there were many Socialists in the town. He said no—there were a few, but the people were too patient and conservative to organise. Yet even here in the old County of Modica, a good many of the old celebrations and customs, so vivaciously described by Guastella, are now no longer kept up. Near Syracuse I was told by a friend, now middle-aged, an intelligent and sympathetic observer, and personally on excellent terms with his labourers, that there was a great change since he was a boy, especially with regard to the songs and dances, in the temper of the country population. "They have become less light-hearted—and full of discontent and distrust—they brood more and dance less" was the substance of what he said, quite objectively. The instinct for dance and song is probably ineradicable in Sicily, a component part of the very fibre of their beings. In remote districts music and song are still interwoven poetically with their lives and occupations, as shown in the very remarkable paper published by Professor Alberto Favara (in the "Transactions of the International Congress of Historic Sciences" held in Rome, 1903) and giving the mystic songs of the washerwomen of Salemi, dancing in a kind of frenzy in a hot pool sheltered by trees, welling up in the river where they do their washing; the love-songs of the young maidens of Vita, full of the perfume of their lovely gardens; the rhythmic chants, showing musical parallels with ancient Greek songs, of the fishermen of the tunny-fisheries along the coast; the Bacchic songs, ending with actual invocations of Bacchus, of the seafolk of Trapani; songs sung by the wives of the sailors when their "men" are on the sea, by carters (*carrettieri*) *en route*. Songs are still heard everywhere, but in modernised districts the beautiful flowers of song now float about detached in the radiant air. Twenty or thirty years ago the "works and days" of country life were regulated by songs, the muleteers still sang love-songs on the high roads, the women at their looms; life was interwoven with, and interpunctuated by song, grown up in set forms round the great formal events of life, or clustering round certain workaday occupations, especially weaving. In 1910, corn, olive oil, and wine are sent by rail and most of the stuffs are bought, at least the showy ones; as far as I know the fine old silk and linen fabric is no longer generally woven (I did not see it worn made up in the now prevailing fashion, only in the old "peasant dress" still worn by some middle-aged women in certain districts). This being so, the break-up having begun even in Sicily, it is more than fortunate that these Sicilian survivals should have been well observed and fully described ten, twenty, or thirty years ago while the tradition was still unbroken. For the purposes of the social historian, it is in a certain sense immaterial whether or no these survivals exist in every detail to-day as described in these books. The main thing is that they should have been exactly and accurately described, as they existed yesterday, not as one of many picturesque forms of an old pre-revolutionary social order, but as a strong silken thread of many bright strands from an earlier fabric, interwoven with the ordinary conditions of modern life.

This invaluable testimony to a state of things still existing, unchanged only yesterday, and therefore still typical to-day, though the process of disintegration has begun, we have in the excellent books of Dr. Pitrè and in some chapters of the late Salamone-Marino's study of peasant life. I can only regret that I have not been able to make more use of this suggestive material. But in writing a short book on Mediæval Sicily the marvels of art of the twelfth century, and all the delightful questions centring round them, naturally claim most of our attention.

⁂

Unfortunately, as all students know to their cost, we are far less well off with regard to material for the history of art than we are in other respects. Small as the field is, and tempting, it has not yet attracted the attention it deserves from modern scholars fully equipped for dealing with all the intricate questions there involved.

This is specially true with regard to the Saracenic factor in Sicilian Mediæval Art. The brilliant and scholarly article by Pavlovski in the *Byz. Zeitschrift* with its wealth of illustration from drawings by Russian artists, proving all the subjects to be purely Persian, was a great step in advance, but the author only seems to know the East at second hand. This also seems to apply to Dr. Goldschmidt, whose careful and thorough monograph on "Die normännische Königspaläste Palermos" is one of the very best of recent contributions to the study ot Sicilian art. What we need and ask tor now that our attention is steadily turning Eastward is, that a scholar really familiar with the artistic idioms of the Orient should deign to turn his attention to the Sicilian dialect. And if, as it seems to the outsider, these pleasure palaces or the exquisite little town houses built by Arabian architects for Franco-Norman princes and wealthy nobles are really, like the ceiling of the Royal Chapel, earlier in date than anything of the same importance *preserved* in the East itself, surely they are worthy of attention?

It is especially desirable that all the inscriptions should be examined again by a modern expert in epigraphy, and published in an accessible form. For the more important inscriptions of the Cuba and the Zisa we have Amari's reading, published in the "Epigrafi Arabiche della Sicilia," Palermo, 1875, and frequently referred to. The second volume, giving the *Iscrizioni Sepolcrali*, does not, however, seem to have been published. Amari's paper on them has been published in the "Rivista Sicula," vol. v., but the photographs such as they were at that date are not forthcoming when asked for, the steles having been moved to the Museum after Amari read them and there is no catalogue. . . .

In this connection I am glad to be able to refer to the interest aroused in two such connoisseurs of Saracenic art as Mr. G. D. Hornblower and Dr. Moritz, Director of the Khedivial Library, by the photographs submitted for examination. Dr. Moritz's very interesting opinion that the fine carved door from the Marturanu house now in the Museum (Pl. X.), dates from A.D. 1000–1030, *i.e.* before the Norman Conquest, has been referred to in the text. Of course a fine piece of carving like this may have escaped destruction and been very carefully preserved after things settled down again, but I venture to ask him and others here if it is not possible that the Saracenic craftsmen in the bazaars of Palermo kept on working after old formulæ for some time after the conquest by the Rûms. This certainly seems to be the case in the Cappella Palatina, where the famous ceiling described in 1149 is surely painted for the chapel—and not taken from some princely Saracenic hall—and adapted. . . .

* * *

On the Sicilian churches again there is only one monograph that is fairly good, if not very important; the article on the Martorana by Patricolo in the Archivio Storico Siciliano. The time has therefore not come for a synthesis, in the true modern sense, of Sicilian archæology. Yet meanwhile collateral research and Sicilian students have been busy, and it is at least possible to put before travellers in Sicily some of the questions at issue, and to offer readers an account of Sicilian Mediæval Art, less antiquated than that in vogue among English travellers, even well-read ones. Much confusion has been engendered especially by the loose use of the word "Norman," which is sometimes used, as in England, for the round-arched early mediæval architecture known on the Continent as Romanesque, and sometimes for a supposed and entirely imaginary "Norman" quality in the art of the brief Norman period—while the so-called "Case Normanne" (Pl. LI.) or "Porte Normanne" of Palermo mostly date from the fourteenth century.

My main printed sources of information, beyond those already referred to, are indicated in the brief List of Books Recommended at the end of the book. My personal obligations to individuals are many and it is a pleasure to acknowledge them.

My thanks are due, first and foremost, to the kind friend in Palermo to whom this book is dedicated; also to Monsignore Gioacchino di Marzo and Professor C. Garufi; in Syracuse to Professor Paolo Orsi, and to my friend Avv. Antonio Nicastro; in Scicli to Baron Francesco Mormina Penna and Signor Saverio Santiápichi. I also wish to thank Mr. Basil C. Williams of Palermo, and Miss Marie Helms of Taormina, for kind practical assistance, and the Cav. E. Interguglielmi, the artistic photographer of Palermo, for excellent work and unstinted zeal, truly Sicilian in spirit. The Signori Incorpora, Crupi, Brogi and Alinari have kindly put their photographs at my disposal. Among English scholars I wish to thank Mr. W. R. Lethaby and Mr. A. F. Kendrick for help and friendly counsel in various ways. My great obligations to Mr. G. D. Hornblower and to Dr. Moritz of the Khedivial Library of Cairo have already been referred to.

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MEDIÆVAL SICILY

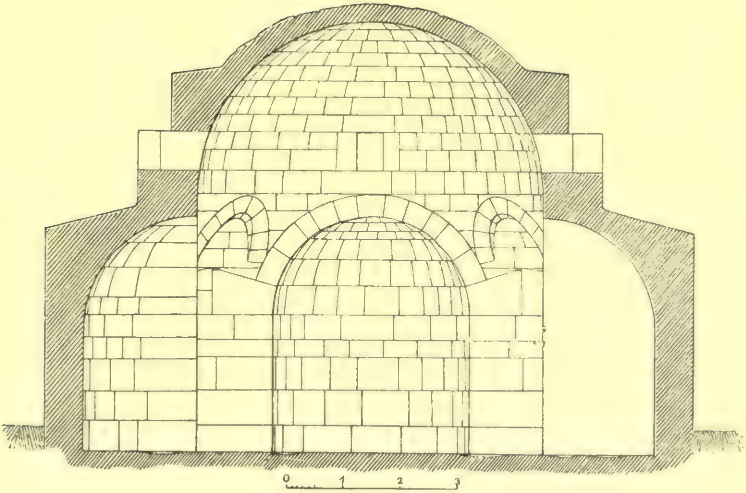
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The catacombs of Syracuse with the interesting underground church of San Marziano—in plan a Latin Cross with rude "early Christian" carving below the fine (later) frescoes—bear witness to the fact that Roman Christianity had struck root in the island by the middle of the fourth century; contemporary writers to the fact that a good many monasteries—those outposts of mediæval civilisation—were founded during the course of the sixth century by Gregory the Great and those wishing to imitate him. In the eighth century—*i.e.* after the conquest by Belisarius—these religious communities are said to have rivalled those of Rome itself in wealth, membership, and learning; several Sicilian monks becoming Popes in Rome.

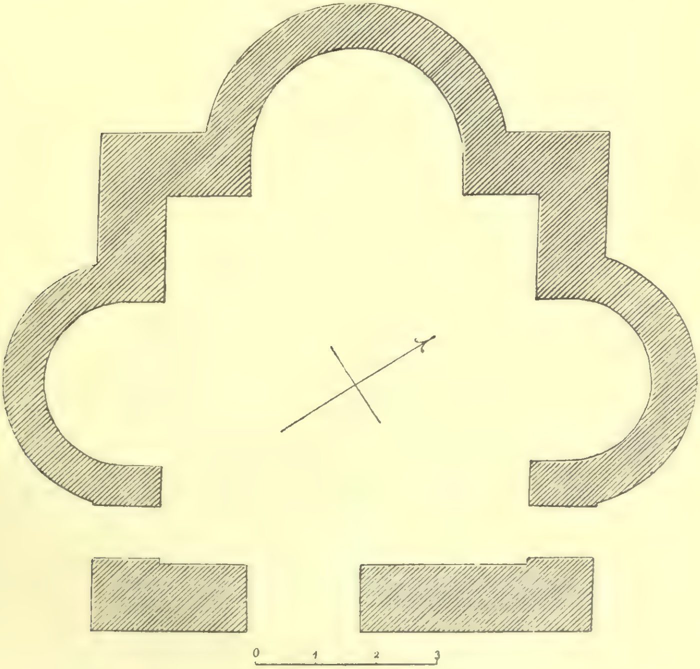
Of this persistent Latinity nothing tangible now remains, as far as we know; but there is no telling what archæological surprises the interesting and unexplored interior of the island may still have in store for us.

Gone, too, are all the larger churches built for, or adapted to, the Eastern rite during the two centuries or so of Byzantine rule. The island was conquered politically in 535, ecclesiastically about 735, when the patriarch of Byzantium became overlord of the Sicilian Church. It seems to have been still flourishing at the beginning of the ninth century. There were two archbishoprics, one at Catania and one at Syracuse, with suffragan bishops at Taormina, Messina, Cefalù, Termini, Palermo, Lilibeo (now Marsala), Triocala, Girgenti, Tindaro, Lentini, Alesa (Malta and Lipari). There was thus a certain number of important Byzantine churches on the island. What seem to be important ruins with a fine mosaic floor have been found near Salemi. Some small churches have survived ; one at Malvagna (near the Circum-Etna railway), and several in the province of Syracuse. From the careful study by Professor Paolo Orsi I take-leave to borrow diagrams of the most complete and interesting of these, the one at Maccari, still surrounded by the scattered remains of a Byzantine village, and very Byzantine in cruciform plan (with the west arm as it were atrophied) and domed construction. As shown by the illustrations, there is



CHURCH AT MACCARI
Section.

Byz. Zeitschrift, vol. vii.



CHURCH AT MACCARI: GROUND PLAN
After P. Orsi, "Chiese Bisantine."

Byz. Zeitschrift, vol. vii. *facing p. 2*

no drum ; the dome rests directly on the arches of the apses and four stout little arches bridging over the corners. Until about a generation ago there were traces of painted images of saints in the main apse. The two little churches of Croce Camerina, with a similar dome, have a prolonged west arm, by Orsi explained as a narthex, by Strzygowski considered as pointing to derivation from one of the remarkable early Christian church types in Asia Minor which have had so much influence on the development of the Romanesque church type of Western Europe.*

Other churches, shown to be Byzantine by the inscriptions, are rock-cut—the most important of them being at Pantilica. Side by side with the vast prehistoric cemeteries of the Siculi which honeycomb the superb flank of the mountain, Professor Orsi has discovered several settlements or villages of rock-cut dwellings, each grouped round a little oratory. The largest of these, known as Filiporto, has a hundred and fifty-one of those rock-cut houses ; some are of a certain importance, with a vestibule and porter's niche, several rooms well arranged, little niches for cupboards, traces in the rock-hewn walls of indentations showing that beams were used for barring doors, and some of the rooms divided up by party-walls, with even a kind of rough upper floor or solar in places; and a kind of court or kitchen, open to the sky, with a cistern for water. The tiny little church has all the necessary appointments of the Greek cult. A tiny presbytery, with one apse flanked by two small niches and with two benches of stone along the side walls, is screened off by a kind of iconostasis wall (rock-cut), with openings from an irregular outer space for the congregation, with a *cantharos* or cistern for ablutions in a corner. There are considerable remains of Greek inscriptions and painting in fresco; one head is sufficiently well preserved to show a "distinctly Byzantine type."

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* *Cf.* W. R. Lethaby, "Mediæval Art," chaps. i.–iii., and Strzygowski "Klein Asien," p. 223.

⁂

Paganism died hard in the beautiful island devoted to Ceres, as in all mountain countries with imaginative inhabitants. As late as the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great, when writing of Sicily, complains of the large number of idolaters still found there, *i.e.* those still observing certain formal Pagan rites. It is, perhaps, significant that the iconoclastic reform of the eight century should have met with such fierce popular violence in Sicily.

Many of those old rites and observances, themselves often grown up in the far-away days of an immemorial past, still linger in Sicily; sometimes even in forms that are still quite obviously and picturesquely Pagan, as will be seen in the chapter on country life; in others quaintly overlaid with later conceptions. Among the most curious of these survivals are the many traditional dishes and kinds of food, and the great number and variety of quaint forms of votive and symbolical or emblematic bakery associated with the main Catholic or local festivals. To mention only a few of the more singular ones: *pappardelle* (a kind of *pasta*) are eaten on New Year's Day, but ordinary macaroni is considered unwholesome. *Cuccìa*, a kind of couscous made of boiled wheat and vegetables, should be eaten on St. Lucia's Day, but everything made of flour should be avoided. Beans—to which the ancients attached so much significance, both as symbols of fertility and as representing in some way the souls of dead ancestors—are now, as of old, a great feature of the joyous festivals in June (moved from the first to the eve of St. John), and again on All Souls' Day, in several peculiar forms; at Vicari they are given in alms to the poor with rude little figures made of bread, supposed to represent souls in Purgatory. Then there is the team of yoked oxen thickly studded with nuts, given to children on New Year's Day at Ragusa; the puppets of SS. Cosma e Damiano, baked effigies of those saints, or of ladies with their arms akimbo, made of the old sacrificial ingredients, wheat meal and honey ; the dove of bread or confectionery eaten at Syracuse and in some other places on Easter Saturday ; the *pupi coll' ova*, a kind of Easter cake or sweetmeat simulating or enclosing eggs ; in some places real *pupi* (dolls) with an egg inside, representing grotesque animals, monks, priests and other figures, sometimes dressed up in real clothes of scraps of silk and muslin ; the "spectacles" of St. Lucia, the patron saint of the eyesight ; the crown of St. Joseph bristling with red spikes; and all the other fantastic fish-shaped, fowl-shaped or elaborately decorative forms of baked dough that delight and bewilder one, wherever one may happen to be, in the bakers' displays in popular quarters as certain festivals draw near. St. Joseph's Day is generally a great opportunity for the study of these curious links with the past. The connection is not always evident, and one must never forget to take into account the tricksy spirit of pure artistic caprice, invariably set free as soon as a certain skill is acquired by practice in any of the representative arts, however humble.

Other instances of survivals will be mentioned in other connections ; the subject had to be touched upon here, to suggest, at the outset, a population clinging as obstinately to forms of belief once acquired as they still cling to their lovely Greek and Arabian jars. Sicilian conservatism is mingled with receptivity of the fine plastic quality which takes impressions vividly and deeply, when it takes them at all. It is this circumstance which gives such a peculiar interest to the study of their art.

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The social condition of the conquered people under Arab rule may be briefly set forth here. The Arabs began coming for pillage from the East early in the eighth century, and made repeated brilliant raids from Africa, without, however, settling, during the course of this eighth century. They came in force in 827, besieged and took possession of Palermo in 831—after four years of fierce warfare, teeming with picturesque incident—and were practically masters of the island by 878, when the Greek capital, Syracuse, fell, and was left "a labyrinth of ruins, without a living soul." The greater part of the population was butchered; others, with the learned and venerable Bishop Sophronius among the number, were carried away as prisoners across the hills to the Arabian capital of *Balerm*; and with them went an almost incredible amount of valuable booty to add to the Byzantinism latent in the Saracenic art of Palermo. Many delightful puzzles would doubtless be solved if we could follow the traces of some of these forced peregrinations *en masse* of beautiful art objects.

In 882 the enfeebled and listless Byzantine authorities left the island. The inhabitants of the Val Demone or Eastern district, however, continued their resistance, and Taormina held out till 902. For one reason or another the Mohammedans never found it worth their while to colonise the Val Demone thoroughly, which remains more or less "Greek" to this day. Nor did their mode of conquest in general necessarily entail sweeping changes in existing conditions. A few mountain strongholds in the Val Demone, considered impregnable or perhaps not worth the trouble of taking, actually retained their municipal independence, at least to begin with. One of these was Troina, a name that will recur later. Other municipalities found it wisest to become tributary and be allowed municipal self-government, on the condition of paying the same tribute that had been exacted by the Byzantine Government. Most of these, however, seem to have lost their freedom when the Normans came. Other places were dealt with according to the measure of their folly; those that resisted and refused to come to terms were sacked and their inhabitants carried away into slavery. Others, towns or whole districts, that surrendered in time and could make stipulations were accorded the *amân* or surety, a codified form of tolerance or protection, which has some points of quaint social interest with regard to the relations between conquerors and conquered. The *Dsimmi*, as they were called, were allowed to live according to their own laws and custom, to hold and bequeath property, to make legal contracts, but were all grouped together socially under the designation of *Dsimmi*, or subjected. To mention a few points only, these *Dsimmi* were forbidden to drink wine in public or follow their dead to the tomb with pomp or any sign of grief; to insult Mohammedan women; to speak with irreverence of the Koran, or even, curiously enough, to read it aloud to their children, or to discuss the Messiah with the Mohammedans; to adopt the Muslim dress or the names of the Muslims; or to try to pry into the houses of their masters. If a Mohammedan came into a room full of *Dsimmi* they were all to rise to their feet in sign of inferiority. By the tyrant Ibrahim they were also ordered to put distinguishing marks—the Christians a swine, the Jews an ape—on their houses and their clothes, and to wear belts of wool or leather.

They were allowed to practise their own religion but not to ring bells in public or to carry the cross in procession through the streets, to keep their churches in repair but not to build new ones. This clause, if observed in Sicily, would be important as indicating that the Greek Christian church type in Sicily may have remained stationary from the middle of the ninth century onwards.

CHAPTER II

THE ARABS IN SICILY

The principal facts and dates of the Saracen invasion of Sicily have been briefly mentioned above, and need not be repeated here.

It was in 831, then, that the Arabs became masters of the old Roman capital of Panormus, made it their headquarters under the name of Balerm, and gradually began to settle in the well-watered plains girdled by magnificent mountains, later known as the Conca d'Oro. It should be noted that the Arab occupation was never a tranquil or peaceful one. The Byzantines did not give way at once, but made one or two attempts to recover their lost domains ; the native population resisted the new invasion strenuously. The Mohammedans, again, were constantly at war among themselves. It would be needless here to dwell on the complicated causes : on the race hatred between Arabs and Berbers, on old tribal and new dynastic jealousies, on jealousy of caste and class or between " African " and " Sicilian," in some cases leading to open rebellion against the semi-dependence on Africa. . . . It is therefore only all the more remarkable that the arts of peace should have flourished as they did, especially during the latter half of the tenth century.

The beautiful island formerly sacred to Ceres again became the blessed home of agriculture if not exactly the granary of Rome. It is described about the middle of the tenth century by Al Istahri, a Persian traveller, as "so fertile, rich in cereals, cattle and slaves as to surpass by far every other Muslim kingdom bathed by the sea," while ibn Hauqal, the travelling merchant from Bagdad who visited Sicily in 972–3, describes the island as "mostly consisting of arable land" and "covered with crops." He also mentions the luxuriant gardens and market gardens round Palermo, and the excellent system of irrigation by means of conduits from the abundant well-springs. What were the vegetables grown there and sold in the renowned market of Balharah (now the Piazza Ballarò), we wonder? Were they the beautiful coloured and excellent products . . . gayer and more delicate here than elsewhere, when not exclusively Sicilian . . . that now delight the eye and the *gourmandise* of visitors to Palermo? Tender young fennel, like drifts of new-fallen snow, set round with feathery hedges of brilliant green? Gorgeous tomatoes, the luscious fruit that has since slowly found its way to the markets of the North? Sturdy giant broccoli, most grateful to the palate, and offering to the eye a whole gamut of deep full tones of colour, in purples, warm greens, and rich whites? The large and varied family of sprightly salads, in their silken raiment of silver and green? All the wild herbs and grasses, still gathered and sold, the ancestors of the delicacies of future generations? That perplexing but delicate vegetable, the *spargelli*, which seems to have assimilated the properties of asparagus, broccoli, and spinach?—in much the same way that Sicilian art, generally miscalled Norman, has assimilated the art of the Arab, the Byzantine and the Latin into the subtlest of blends. Were they some if not all of these delicacies? For the vegetables we eat, as for the silks we wear, we owe a great debt to the Sicilian Arabs, those transmitters to the West of so many precious gifts from the East. . . .

But the subject does not interest the merchant from Bagdad, who only mentions the cultivation of gourds, and the abuse of raw onions, with the curious comment, which we recommend to the notice of students of the modern science of food-stuffs, that this habit dulls the senses and damages the brain.

Later travellers and geographers are fortunately more explicit, and we shall return to the subject in the chapter describing the flourishing state of the island in the twelfth century, due largely to the Arabs.

We must return to ibn Hauqal and his description of Palermo, the only description by an eye-witness of the vanished glories of Arabic Balerm. He therefore deserves to be quoted at some length,[*] although, as we shall see, the merchant from Bagdad evidently does not belong to the race of the intelligent and highly cultivated Arabian observers; this tenth century record happens, rather, to be an amusing bit of traveller's gossip, not unlike the accounts of certain globe-trotting writers of to-day.

"Palermo," he says, "consists of five quarters; the first of these is the large city, the real Palermo,[†] surrounded by a high wall of stone and inhabited by merchants; here there is the principal mosque (*Moschea gâmi*), that was at one time a church of the Rûms (Christians). . . . The other city is called Al Halisah (the Select),[‡] also surrounded by a wall—but not equal to the first we mentioned. Here the Sultan resides with his court; here there are no markets, no fondaks; there are two baths, a mosque *gâmi*, small but much frequented; the Sultan's prison, the arsenal and the *diwân*. It has four gates, to the south, north, and west; to the east a wall without gates.

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[*] Translating and abridging from the Italian version given by Amari in the "Biblioteca Arabo Sicula."

[†] The Cassaro, or inner City. *Cf.* Plan given with chap. xii.

[‡] Still called the Kalsa.

"The quarter called Harat 'as Saqâlibah* is more important and populous than the two cities beforementioned. Here there is the port, here several well-springs, the waters of which run between this quarter and the old city. The quarter called Harat al Musgid † is also larger—and larger is also Al Harat al Gâdidah, which lies near the Harat al Musgid without separation or interval; nor is the Harat 'as Saqâlibah surrounded by walls. Most of the markets lie between the quarter of the mosque and this new quarter, for instance, the oil-vendors' market, which contains all the shops of the vendors of this commodity. The money-changers and grocers also dwell outside the city walls, and likewise the tailors, armourers, coppersmiths, corn merchants and all the other crafts. But the butchers keep more than a hundred and fifty shops for the sale of meat in the city and here (outside) there are only a few more. . . .

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* Later known as the Transpapyretum or Seralcadì; the Northern Borgo.

† Later the Quartiere della Moschea; part of the Albergaria or Southern Borgo.

"The mosques of the city and of the quarters round it outside the walls exceed the number of three hundred; most of them are furnished with everything, with roofs, walls and doorways. All well-informed persons in the place give the same information and agree as to the number of mosques. . . ."

He then goes on to mention the villages or *mahâlls* "between towers and gardens" in the suburbs, stretching from the banks of the river Wâdî Abbâs (Oreto) to the place called "Al Baydâ" (the present village of Baida), notes their importance and the number of their mosques—more than two hundred—and adds that he had never seen an equal number of mosques, even in cities twice as large as Palermo, nor heard it said of any city except by citizens of Cordova, of their city. For Palermo, he would of a surety affirm it, having seen most of them with his own eyes. In one street he counted ten—one opposite the other within a distance no longer than the flight of an arrow, and was given the explanation that the inhabitants were so puffed up with pride that every one wanted a mosque for himself and his family. Even two brothers dwelling side by side would each have his own separate mosque, while a certain Abu Mohammed, a celebrated jurisconsult, especially versed in matters regarding contracts, actually had a mosque built only twenty paces from his own for his son to give lessons in jurisprudence in. . . . This son thought a good deal of himself and was as puffed up with conceit as if he had been his own father. In an obscure passage ibn Hauqal goes on to describe the disreputable beggars that gather in certain barracks or sheds along the seashore begging for alms and talking evil of honest women, "real ruffians full of every kind of vice." Further on, in connection with the famous passage about the evil consequences to the intellect of the Palermitan habit of eating raw onions night and morning, he describes the three hundred schoolmasters: "To hear them talk, they are God's own men, the worthiest and most virtuous of all. Notwithstanding that every one knows their lack of capacity and their flightiness, they are employed as witnesses. Yet, in sooth, they have only taken up this trade so as to escape the Sacred War and avoid every kind of military service." Returning to his topographical description of Palermo, he says of the Qasr (*Cassaro*, castle), rightly called Palermo, that it is the old city. He enumerates and describes "nine gates in all," starting from the Bab-el-Bahr or Sea Gate, "so called because it is near the sea. Not far from this there is another gate, new and elegant, above the river and spring called the Ayn as Saafa

(Fountain of Health)." And seven others are also mentioned. The city is described as oblong, with a mart that crosses it from west to east and is called As Simat (The Row), paved with stone from one end to another; a fine emporium of every kind of merchandise. He goes on to notice the abundant well-springs, the number of mills planted along the course of the rivulets outside the city walls and the extensive marshes alongside of them, some bearing sugar-cane, some swampy, some planted with gourds. Here there is also a space covered with papyrus . . . most of it is used for ropes for ships—a little for paper for the Sultan.

⁂

Another eye-witness, the monkish writer Theodosius, who was carried captive to Balerm with Archbishop Sophronius in 883, after the fall of Syracuse, and ransomed in 885, gives us invaluable glimpses of street and court life in Balerm nearly a century before it was visited by ibn Hauqal. Describing their reception when the archbishop and his priests were conducted before the Emir, he says that the latter was "seated under a portico and hidden behind a curtain out of tyrannous pride." After a short religious discussion through an interpreter, without religious intolerance on either side, they were conducted back again "across the square in the midst of the city, followed by many Christians, who openly bewailed their lot, and also Muslims, curious to see the renowned archbishop." Balerm, he says, "is full of citizens and strangers, so that there seems to be collected there all the Saracen folk from East to West and from North to South. . . . Blended with the Sicilians, the Greeks, the Lombards and the Jews, there are Arabs, Berbers, Persians, Tartars, Negroes, some wrapped in long robes and turbans, some clad in skins and some half naked ; faces oval, square, or round, of every complexion and profile, beards and hair of every variety of colour or cut."

⁂

Evidently the merchant from Bagdad, quoted above, had not mixed in the best circles, nor had access to the best possible sources of information, but at least he tells us that there were schoolmasters, jurisconsults, and mosque-colleges. Readers of Amari's learned and fascinating "Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia" also know that men of letters and learning abounded in this prosperous and luxurious *milieu*. We must bear in mind that the two and a half centuries of Saracen occupation of Sicily coincided with the great period of Arabic civilisation, then unequalled elsewhere in Western Europe. If the University of Balerm did not vie with that of Cordova in importance, many Sicilians were renowned in the branches of practical knowledge or subtle lore in which the keen Arabian mind found so much delight. Sicily also produced an abundant crop of elegant and highly gifted poets, so that when the break-up came, the Sicilian *émigrés* were as gladly welcomed to the courts of Saracen princes as were those who stayed in Sicily, after a while, at the Norman court of Palermo. One of these *émigrés*, ibn Hamdîs, a Syracusan of noble birth, was one of the most famous poets and brilliant personages of the day in Saracen Spain, specially renowned for his descriptive powers and his insuperable skill in the word-painting of buildings and fountains, yet a true poet nevertheless, in his lyrics and elegies. He often strikes the note of lyrical lament for his lost country ; his best known *Kasida* is, however, an amusing and vivacious picture of youthful dissipation in Saracen Syracuse, full of invaluable descriptive detail. Narrating their midnight revels or follies as young men, he describes the elderly nun, who at night let them into the convent where she kept jars of wine tarred inside and buried in sand, and poured out the *dînâr* (gold) of the amphora in return for their *dirkam* (silver) thrown into the scales; the young man who had studied the cup so well that he could tell the tribe (country) and age of every kind of wine; . . . the festival in the hall, "resplendent with moons (faces) set on the stems of willowy trees (figures), where the king of the revels has banished all care on pain of death for who disobeys; where the singing girls are already touching the chords, this one caressing her lute, that one kissing her flute, while the dancer moves her feet in measure with the hand that beats the tambourine. See the branches of yellow wax with their flowers of fire; you would say that they rest on columns ranged in a row in well-ordered sequence, bearing the shadows aloft and rending the veil of darkness with their flames."

Description like this, firm in line and Rembrandtesque in effect, has suggestive quality, surely, making us see all the minor objects that belong there; the vessels as they are used for serving the wine, or as they gleam in the dim light in the corners: exquisite carving and metal-work; costly vases of glass from Tyre, gem-like in colour; silken veils and hangings interwoven with gold; engraved bronze censors "rolling about harmless on precious carpets," with inscriptions saying that "the due praise of the Emir is as the fragrance of the incense"; and, we may be sure, some kind of beautifully written and highly prized books, decked out in gold and colours.

If we would appreciate duly the importance of the Arabian factor in Sicilian art we must realise, I think, more even than is generally done, by the help of collateral reading, the hold taken on the imagination of the Sicilian Arab of all classes by poetry and by poetic and fanciful conceits, bursting out into bloom in beautiful Arabic lettering along the tops of their palaces, in the ceilings of their halls, on caskets, trays, bottles, even gems, anywhere and everywhere where it seemed to grow up naturally.

We must realise also, as this passage from ibn Hamdîs helps us to do, the highly strung vitality and quick-witted refinement of Arab civilisation; the highly cultivated demand for sumptuous and suggestive surroundings and for lovely objects of daily use, that appealed in some quaint way, not merely to the higher senses, but also to the wit and fancy; and with this demand we must realise, again, a whole population of deft and quick-witted craftsmen, able to appreciate the aptness of an epigram if not to write it themselves.

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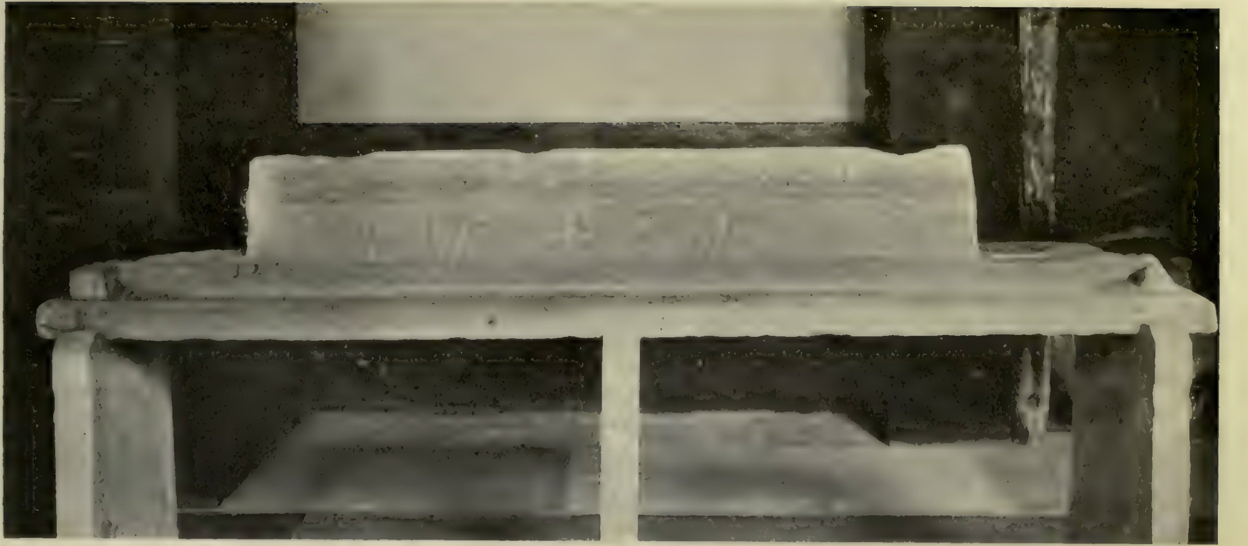
Unfortunately, nothing seems to have survived of all this presumable Sicilian output. As a matter



STELE, MUSEUM, PALERMO

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of fact very few of these portable and perishable objects have survived anywhere from the earliest centuries of Saracenic art, and among those there are none, as far as I know, that are traced by connoisseurs to Sicily. According to one of the most authoritative scholars, Strzygowski, there is indeed no distinction in architectural style during these early centuries between the various dominions of the Arabs round the basin of the Mediterranean. There is, however, a mention, which must not be passed unnoticed, of thirty thousand pieces of Sicilian embroidery among the magnificent treasures left by one of the daughters of the Caliph al Moizz, who died late in the tenth century.

We know as little directly about the style of the buildings of the Saracens in Sicily. Except for one precious fragment of a bath at Cefala-Diana, which may, after all, prove to be Norman, and possibly a little mosque mixed up with the church of S. Giovanni degli Eremiti, nothing has survived the storms of the invasion. Except a few interesting sepulchral steles, Arabic in style and type if not in actual date,* and some lovely columns and capitals which may be studied in the Museum of Palermo and Trapani and in a few churches, the only surviving monuments of the Arabs are the *giarre* or tall tapering water-towers still in use, which are such an extremely picturesque and suggestive feature of Palermo to-day.

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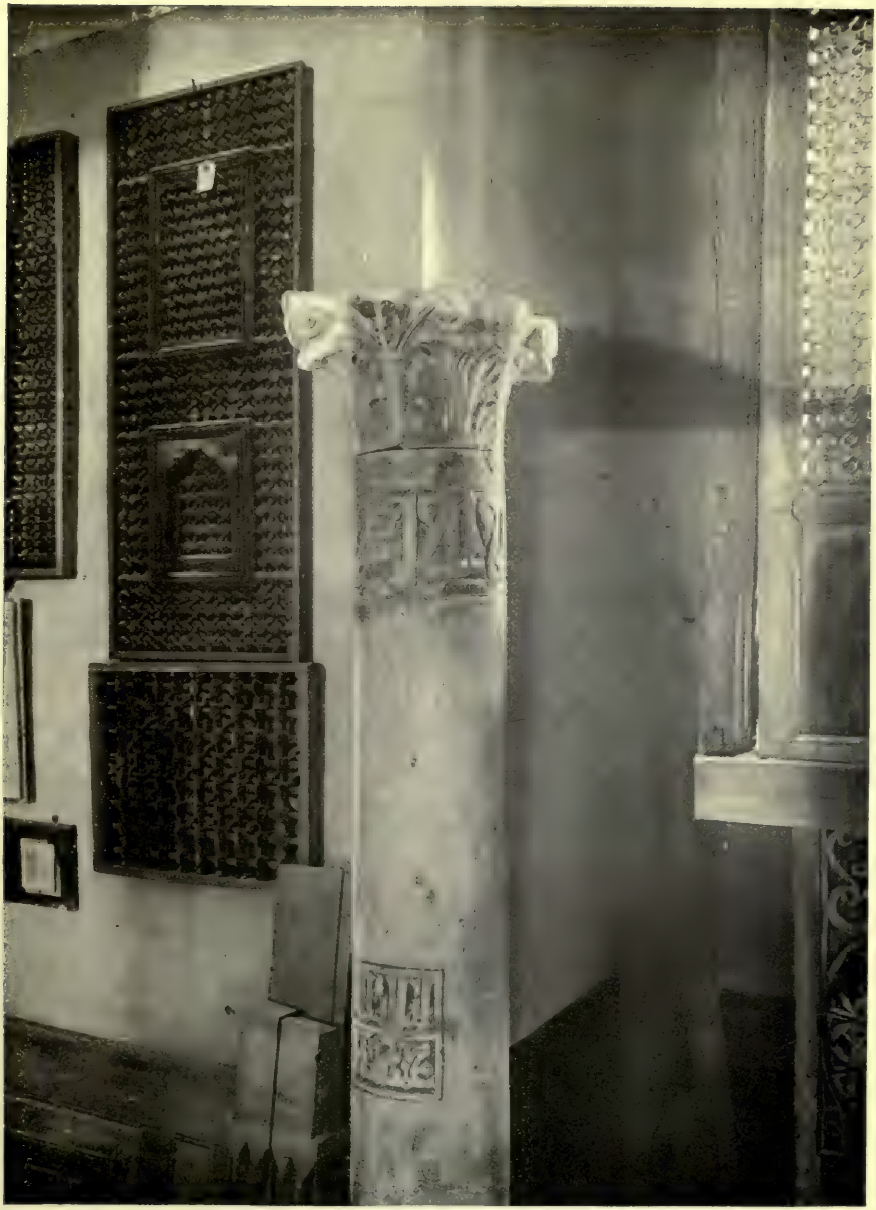
* The earliest one of those read by Amari dates from A.D. 1074. The photograph of the fine one here figured has been submitted to Dr. Moritz, who kindly fixes the date of the style of writing as that in use elsewhere during the first half of the eleventh century.

There is of course the indirect evidence of the Norman pleasure palaces which we shall discuss later, and of some of the renowned sumptuous arts of the Arabo-Norman period to which also we shall return.

Above all there is the indirect evidence, which perhaps we may be allowed to discuss here, offered by the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. It is now generally accepted as belonging to Saracenic art, and indeed the finest of its kind in its superb combination of carving, gilding, ornamental and figure painting. In design it is thoroughly Saracenic, and may be compared with similar ceilings, purely ornamental however, in Cairo, showing a network of stars enclosing sunk panels and supported on a broad cornice of honeycomb or stalactite bracketing. There was a very fine one in the great mosque of Damascus seen and described in 1184 by ibn Jubair. The pictorial and ornamental style shows Persian influence, it is said; the *genre* subjects certainly recall those on the inlaid copper bosses from Mossoul—though these happen to be later in date. Now if we accept this ceiling as the work of Arabo-Sicilian craftsmen, and waive as



SARACENIC COLUMN, MUSEUM, PALERMO

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impertinent the supposition that Roger II. called in Persian painter-joiners from Egypt as he called in mosaicists from Greece, it is evident, surely, that there must have been a flourishing school of painting in Arabic Sicily, and a goodly number of similar ceilings in the "Saracen cities, castles and palaces, built with marvellous art" destroyed by Count Roger, as he boasts in one of his preambles. The artistic tradition here manifest must have been very firmly established in Saracen Sicily, if the afterglow—beginning after the sun of Arabic civilisation had set—shows art of this importance. Recent investigations tend to show, moreover, that this tradition drew its inspiration from the fountain head, the miraculous source of inspiration in the Middle East.

The light in the nave being dim, it was not really known to scholars until early in the nineties, when Pavlovski, a Russian scholar, had very careful drawings made of it by competent artists, and published those with his conclusions in the "Byz. Zeitschrift," vol. ii. According to Pavlovski, the iconography is entirely Oriental, without the slightest admixture of Western conceptions. Some are fantastic and legendary, others fantastic and grotesque—fanciful or merely decorative; others again pure *genre*. The legendary representations do not merely comprise subjects such as the

Ascension of Alexander, which have, like many of the fantastic grotesques or poetic fairy tales, found their way *viâ* Byzantium to Venice, Otranto, and other places in the West, but there are several others of the greatest iconographical interest, including recondite legends from India. The *genre* subjects are delightfully quaint representations of Oriental *joie de vivre*: the exterior of a sumptuous tent, evidently of silk, with grotesques embroidered on medallions, like those in the princely caravans seen at Mecca by ibn Jubair; two gentlemen seated cross-legged inside the same tent playing at chess or draughts, with a flower-vase behind, others draining the saké-bowl, gambling, playing the flute; others on horseback, hunting or jousting; musicians playing quaint instruments; houris dancing or languishing; a lady on an elephant; camels bearing sumptuous litters; gazelles, huge parrots, winged genii. *Genre* merges into decoration, as it always does when the spirit of art is abroad. Tall, graceful white birds have stiff apple-tree tails, nondescript dragons terminate in luxuriant scrolls. All the little compartments or panels are duly circumscribed as in all good decorative art, but the panel is apparently filled with either ornament or figures as it suited the fancy of the painter.

All this is as Oriental, to use a vague general word advisedly, in pictorial and ornamental style, as in iconography; as uncontaminated by any Western decorative feeling (for instance, in the foliage or the scrolls) as by any suggestion of Western life, or manners and customs.

This ceiling is not quite an isolated instance of work of this kind. On some of the tie-beams of the dark timber roof of the cathedral of Cefalù, near Palermo, there are spirited representations of the same kind of *genre* subjects done in white and colour. Several later timber roofs and ceilings in palaces and churches, showing a blend of the West and the East in the ornament, and all having more or less stalactite brackets, also tend to show the firm hold taken by this fashion in decoration. To this day the painted donkey-carts show an admixture of Saracenic ornamental ideas.

There is thus reason to suppose that there were plenty of similar ceilings in Norman Palermo, though the only one that has been preserved to us is the one safely enshrined by a happy chance in a Royal Chapel.

It remains to account for the Persian style of this ceiling. Would it be far-fetched to believe in the existence, in Arabian Palermo (Balerm), of a painter-joiners' quarter, inhabited by Persians and the descendants of Persians, who handed on their stock-in-trade, their workshop tradition of Persian subjects, from father to son, guarding it conservatively from all foreign admixture ?

Or is it more likely that the purity of Persian style, if proven, denotes a fresh influx of Persian painters to this same quarter when the period of Norman prosperity set in . . . ?

CHAPTER III

THE NORMAN RULE

It was in 1061 that the two Norman chieftains, at the head of their small band of adventurers, landed outside Messina, called in by the great rebel, ibn Thimna, and only too willing to come. It is, however, of interest to the student of art to note that there never was a Norman invasion in the sense in which there was a Saracen invasion. The knightly adventurers of the house of Hauteville in Normandy first came at the head of small bands of mixed soldiery. When they finally brought something resembling a feudal army, it was principally collected from their feudal domains on the mainland of Italy. Their brilliant exploits have often been likened to the deeds of impossible prowess recounted in the old French *romans d'aventure* (*cf.* " L'histoire de li Normant et la Chronique de Robert Viscard, par Aimé moine du Mont Cassin " . . . which reads like one of them) . . . with the great difference, however, that there was nothing either chivalrous or fantastic about their ideals and aims. Nor were the two d'Hautevilles any longer mere impulsive Northmen, bent only on brilliant raids and showy booty ; they were long-headed French Normans, bent on settlement and revenue. It is characteristic that when the elder brother left the island in 1072, after the taking of Palermo, he chose as his permanent share the wealthy capital, and took care not to disturbits economic arrangements too rudely. Before going, however, he levied a "voluntary" tax on the Saracen merchants, which was paid in money and objects of value. Among these there is mention of iron doors, and columns with their capitals, that special if somewhat unwieldy form of mediæval booty, carried off to Troja in Apulia. Among the much-prized gifts of Robert to the monastery of Monte Cassino, there is also mention of two Arab hangings and other precious objects of the kind, presumably from Palermo.

There is no doubt about the fierce thoroughness of the warlike methods of conquest employed by Robert Guiscard and Roger ; indeed Count Roger makes a boast of them later, in the quaint wordy preambles to his deeds of gift and foundation, which were then still the naïve early mediæval fashion ; we know, besides, that when a pitched battle was won, as at Troina or Butera, the prisoners of war were generally carried off into Calabria, and sold into slavery. But when Palermo capitulated in 1072 all its Mohammedan inhabitants were conceded complete religious and civic liberty, even left unmolested in their laws and customs, smaller mosques and quarters, and allowed to keep their own magistrates and lower tribunals. The Governor of the city was one of Robert's men, but as he received the Saracenic title of Emir, it is probable that the old administrative machinery was made use of.

It was indeed, or became, part of the Norman policy to make use of this machinery as far as possible. The invaders were few and mostly men of action, not of affairs. The virtual chief, Count Roger, was a born ruler of men such as they develop in great formative periods, gifted alike with the personal initiative and the masterful firmness necessary in what was still a semi-heroic age, yet with miraculous insight into the minds of men and into matters that would seem to be beyond his ken. He needed soldiery for his various warlike enterprises on the mainland and elsewhere, and found them by pacifying the island so rapidly that he was able to employ Saracen troops only five years after the last decisive defeat of the Saracens in Sicily. He needed accountants and civil servants, and was quick to see that here was the most marvellous machinery in Europe lying ready for use, somewhat rusty, probably, after thirty years of warfare, but still in fair working order. So when feudalism was introduced as a matter of course and a certain portion of the conquered or abandoned territory, but by no means all, was distributed among his followers, it was, as we are told in a deed of 1090, preserved in Pirro's fifteenth-century translation, *Secundum anticas divisionem Saracenorum.* There is also mention, in later Norman deeds relating to land, of the authority of certain Arabic registers known as *defetarii.* Indeed all business, as we shall see later, relating to land tenure or property in land, such as grants of land and serfs, decisions regarding disputed boundaries, &c., was transacted, it is now averred, by a department of the Treasury taken over bodily from the Arabs and known in Arabic as the *Diwan-el-Thakik-el-Mamur*, or in Latin as the *Duane de Secretis.* Besides this there was, later, a department dealing with feudal obligations known as the *Duane Baronum* or Diwan of the Barons; a curious instance pointed out by Professor Garufi of the grafting in of French feudalism on the pre-existing Arabic institutions.

The institution of feudalism was a formal affair. A first informal distribution probably took place in 1077, another more definite in 1091. In 1093 all the lords benefited were convened at Mazzara and given copies of the *plateæ* or long rolls written in

Arabic, or sometimes in Greek and Arabic, containing a description of the lands and enumeration of the serfs and villains attributed to each of them. All of these first *plateæ* have unfortunately been lost, but there is express mention of them in the earliest *platea* preserved, made out in favour of the Bishop of Catania in 1095.

It should be noted here that feudalism was not allowed to predominate in Count Roger's division of the spoil. He was careful to keep the lion's share for himself, thus laying the foundation of the immense wealth of his house; the Church was also greatly benefited; some of the more submissive among the Arab landed gentry came in for their share of the spoil; there was also a certain proportion of free or semi-free *burgisi*—dwellers in the cities or towns that came to terms in time—who were allowed to keep their small freeholds, or tenures. . . . Then, as now, it should be noted, the Sicilian peasantry, whether bond or free, lived in towns, large or small, in many cases in the very same agricultural centres now inhabited by their descendants; then, as now, also, they therefore rode out to their distant fields, astride on their mules, when they could afford to keep one, down the steep rocky bridle-paths still in use, with doubtless the same look of inscrutable solemnity on their Sikelian features still worn by their descendants. . . . In these towns, again, some kind of old Byzantine and newer Arab officials would be found that could be made use of —for the administration of revenues, the policing of the town populations, &c., and the government of the province. The vestiges of municipal order in the small Greek towns in the mountain districts of the East would naturally be made the most of. Nor must we forget, in this rapid enumeration of the scattered vestiges of institutions found and made wise use of by Count Roger, the Basilian, *i.e.* Greek, monasteries so liberally benefited by him and his widow and son. The first Norman Archbishop of Palermo was a Greek ecclesiastic. When the old Cathedral of Palermo, which had been turned into a mosque by the Arabs, was reconsecrated with great pomp and solemnity in 1072, "with tears of compunction and joy, and the sweet voices of angels heard singing Hosanna," it was a Greek "Archbishop" Nicodemos, called in from the small church of San Ciriaca below Monreale, who was installed.

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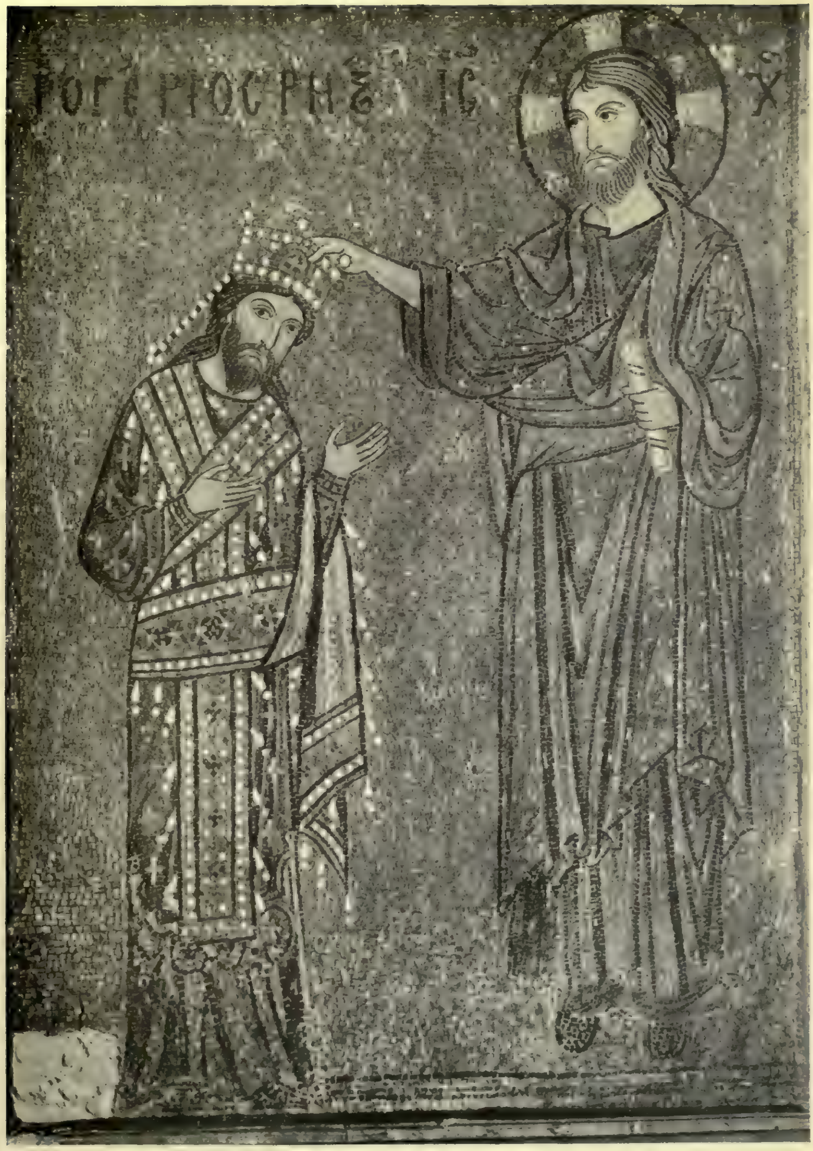
All this wise policy of conciliation initiated by Roger I. was carried still further by Roger II., with whom it was probably not a question of feeling but of preference. He was born in Sicily late in his father's life (in 1095) after this policy of paci-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CHRIST CROWNING KING ROGER, THE MARTORANA, PALERMO

Alinari

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fication had begun to bear fruit, and such of the scared folk of poets and men of learning as had not winged their flight across the sea had ventured out again into the open. The highly gifted lad would be the first to profit by intercourse with them, especially, as it proved, with geographers and mathematicians.

Roger II., born in 1095, was a child when his father, Count Roger, died in 1101, and only ten years old when he succeeded his brother Simon in 1105. His young mother, Adelasia (Adelaide), proved, for once, a wise and capable regent. He seized the reins of government in 1112, when seventeen years of age, became lord and overlord of all the Norman States in Southern Italy in 1127, at the death of the last descendant of Robert Guiscard; let himself be proclaimed king by the Optimates in Salerno and the Parliament of Palermo, and was crowned with great splendour in Palermo in 1130. This date marks an epoch in Sicilian art.

He was at war all his life with rebellious vassals or dreaded neighbours, and it was not always successful warfare. Yet Roger, who, like the English, never chose to know when he was beaten, left his realm in a position such as we should now describe as that of a Great Power, and his beloved island the brilliant centre of a polyglot civilisation more conspicuous even, for a brief span of years, than Byzantium itself.

There is abundant contemporary testimony to the fact that Palermo was considered one of the wonders of the world even by dwellers round the Mediterranean. All these writers agree in praising Roger for the qualities of a great king, in the fine mediæval sense of great promptness of decision and vigilant firmness of purpose, keen intelligence, superb vitality, and withal, a capacity for hard work of the most varied kinds, which made his biographer Edrisi say of him, that he accomplished more asleep than other men awake. No one vaunts his clemency and all mention his close-fistedness. His aim was order, and that well-being at home, that prestige and power abroad, which comes from having coffers full and a realm wisely and well governed.

The first written code of Sicilian Law is due to him, and is, we are told, like his administration, a masterpiece of intelligent adaptation of old laws, and making of new laws to meet the homely needs of a mixed population, on a par with the practical wisdom shown in allowing each nationality to live under its own laws and codes of custom. He was a lover and patron of letters and learning, and of art, too, in a lordly way, probably superintending the building himself, certainly going very carefully into the accounts; yet as quick to see when he had best not interfere as he was wise in selecting his Ministers and officials—mostly Orientals these—the most prominent being a Syrian Greek, the Emir of the Emirs, Giorgios from Antioch, and Edrisi, the geographer, a Spanish Arab of the princely house of Beni Hammûd of Malaga.

In spite of his patriarchal Norman love of economy he knew how to spend when it suited his purpose. His ideal of kingship was in many respects Oriental, based on emulating the Byzantine Basileos (Emperor) whose garb he adopted. . . . At his coronation, according to Alexander of Telese, the floors of his palace glowed sumptuously all round with multicoloured carpets, offering a suave pleasure to those who trod on them; palfreys with saddles and bridles of gold and wrought silver were led in his train; at the banquet no food or drink was served in aught but cups and vessels of silver and gold, and there was not even a servant who was not clothed in silk . . . and all present were duly impressed.

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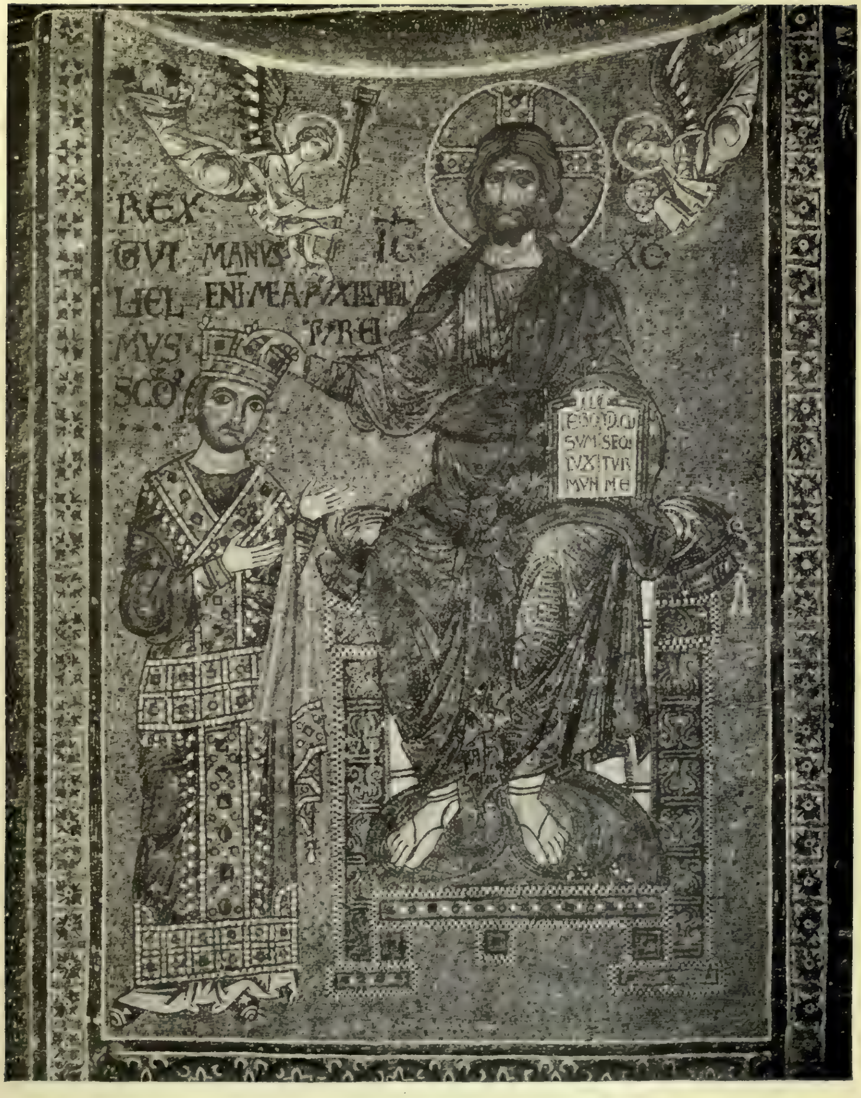
A rapid glance at the principal events and personalities of the following reigns will serve to show how dramatic was the conflict of influences and personalities at the short-lived cosmopolitan court of Palermo.

Roger died in 1154, and was succeeded by his son, William, surnamed the Bad, but by modern historians portrayed as not so black as he was painted. Tall, handsome, strong, and personally brave when aroused, and a ruler when he chose, he was irresolute, indolent, self-indulgent and luxury-loving, and left the conduct of affairs in the hands of his queen, Margaret of Navarre (called "the Spanish Woman" by the people), and his Prime Minister Majone, the son of a judge of Bari in Apulia. Now Majone "the great Chancellor," a man of great gifts and boundless personal ambition, did not possess the art of either conciliating or dominating the growing restlessness of the discontented and wealthy feudal nobility on both sides of the Straits of Messina. Whether Frenchmen by descent, Italians, or Spanish kinsmen of the queen's, they were excluded from all influence at court. It was Majone's own ward and presumptive son-in-law, the brilliant young noble Matthew Bonnel, who finally headed the conspiracy against him and assassinated him in 1160. The wavering of the king during the months of crisis that followed led to a conspiracy against him, during which the palace was sacked and robbed of all its portable treasures by the conspirators. So if we owe the Zisa and the completion of the Palatine Chapel to William's love of art and splendour, we also owe the loss of inestimable art treasures to his lack of decision at the right moment.

He died in 1166 and was mourned publicly, says Hugh Falcandus, in the streets of Palermo by bands of Saracen women, "clothed in sacks and with streaming hair, filling the air with their howls, and responding with sad dirges to the beating of the tambourines."

His son, William II., being only thirteen years of age at his father's death, Queen Margaret became regent. The Ministers chosen, or rather taken over by her, were three : Richard Palmer, the Englishman, bishop-elect of Syracuse ; Matteo d'Ajello from Salerno, protonotary ; and Caid Peter, the eunuch. The favour shown Peter by the queen soon made him unpopular—the anti-Saracen agitation had then already begun—and he had to flee the country. Meanwhile Margaret, feeling powerless to cope with all the intrigues buzzing round her, had written to her uncle on her mother's side, the Archbishop of Rouen, asking him to send out a kinsman to help her. He sent their handsome young cousin, Stephen, the son of the Count of Perch, who came in the autumn of 1160 at the head of thirty-seven enterprising young Frenchmen. Stephen was immediately made Chancellor by the Queen and, about a year later, also Archbishop.

All these Frenchmen seem to have been conspicuously lacking in the assimilative power of the earlier French invaders. Many of them were mere adventurers ; one of these, Jean de Lavardin, even tried to impose French feudal customs on the lands given him in fief. Stephen himself, who was as well-intentioned as he was well-favoured, tried to put down abuses with a high hand, regardless of either custom or precedent—this in the Middle Ages and in Sicily ! He thus managed to offend one powerful faction after another, until he, too, was obliged to flee the country in 1168, after sustaining a picturesque siege in the sturdy belfry of the cathedral. In the letters of Peter of Blois, the learned Frenchman who was appointed tutor to the young king, alongside of the Englishman, Walter of the Mill, we even catch amusing glimpses of certain prejudices of temperament and palate that explain a good deal. He calls Sicily the Gates of Hell, a country monstrous and mountainous, needing the devices of a really efficient saint like St. Thomas of Canterbury to save one from peril, from earthquakes and volcanoes ; inhabited by a race as fierce and perfidious as their climate. Compared with this he sighs wistfully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CHRIST CROWNING KING WILLIAM II., CATHEDRAL, MONREALE

Brogi

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for the soft, sweet air of England, and for the good English food compared with the fennel and celery of Sicily, and congratulates his brother, when he leaves the island, on being back in Blois drinking the excellent product of the vineyards round Blois instead of the poisonous Sicilian wines. . . .

William II., surnamed the Good, when he finally began to reign in 1171, proved wise, pious and a great favourer of the Latin clergy, regular and secular. His first tutor, the low-born English clerk, Walter of the Mill, became Archbishop of Palermo. William's pet creation was the famous Benedictine monastery at Monreale, which was benefited regally by him with immunities, privileges, and large gifts in land and serfs according to the fashion of the day.

After his death without issue in 1189, there was an interregnum. The Sicilian party raised Tancred, one of the illegitimate princes, to the throne. Another faction, with the Archbishop Gualtiero Offamiglio at their head, conspired to call in the German Emperor, Henry VI., who claimed the throne on behalf of his wife Constance, the posthumous daughter of Roger II. He came in 1194, but more like an invader than one come to claim his own, and left again in 1196 carrying away a prodigious amount of booty. At his death in 1198 he was succeeded by his infant son, Frederick II., the famous German Emperor, who was thus the grandson of Roger II.

* * *

The greatest apparent change in the social conditions of the island, due to the Normans, was doubtless wrought by the introduction of feudalism. It was not allowed to get the upper hand under the first two powerful rulers; the abuses of feudalism from which Sicily has suffered, and still suffers, so severely, are due to later development. Yet there it was, nevertheless, with some of its well-known features: the existence of a class of brilliant, and sometimes turbulent, feudal nobility with their vassals and retainers; the building or fortifying of castle strongholds (of which only a few vestiges now remain; the greater part have been rebuilt in later centuries); and most of the evils and abuses of the seigneurial *régime*, such as we know it in other lands.

But these barons came to a semi-Orientalised court, especially during the first two reigns, when they travelled to Palermo to attend the King's Council. If they found a Seneschal, a Marshal, a Chamberlain, and other functionaries with French titles, and a fair sprinkling of clergy, Latin and Greek, they also found a logothete and archonts, caids, and a host of minor officials with Arabic titles, the king's cook being one—a significant circumstance which should not be overlooked. These barons would find the principal personage in Roger's *entourage* known as the Emir of the Emirs (or Admiral of the Admirals) and Archont of the Archonts, a kind of Grand Vizier and commander-in-chief; the king himself wearing the garb and emulating the stately pomp of the Byzantine Basileos (Emperor) ; a palace almost entirely Saracenic in style and dreamy splendour, crowded with Mohammedan eunuchs, supple Greek men of affairs, Arab poets, geographers, and men of letters, men of every stamp and nationality, including learned Jews who were made especially welcome, and French or Provençal minstrels. . . . The languages written were three —Greek, Arabic, and Latin—the languages spoken must have been at least four if not five : Greek, Arabic, French of sorts—understood if not currently spoken, as French *jongleurs* were always made welcome "with their tales of Roland and Oliver," of Lancelot and Arthur—clerkly Latin, and the new form of colloquial Latin, which had not yet, like the sister dialects of the *Langue d'oc* and *Langue d'oïl*, found an expression in literature. That it was the language of the people, that monkish Latin was not understood by them in the twelfth century, is formally attested by a little bit of precious contemporary evidence in a deed of 1133. In this, the renewal of an earlier deed regulating the condition of affairs between the bishop and the men of Lipari, it is expressly said that when read, it was also "set forth in the vulgar tongue"—for their benefit evidently. On the other hand, all the various new dialectical forms of old Latin, which we now call the Romance languages, seem to have been easily understood everywhere—by the quicker-witted ones. (There is a parallel case now in the three Scandinavian languages.) In all this bright polyglot concert it would be interesting to know what was the language naturally resorted to, say at the deliberations of a mixed assemblage such as the King's Council, towards the close of Roger's reign. . . .

Later, French became, if not the official language, at least the polite and courtly language, as indeed elsewhere in Europe at the time, with the diffusion of French culture and French poetry, epic and lyric. The Queen Regent, Margaret of Navarre, a Frenchwoman on her mother's side, had a French tutor, poor Peter of Blois—he who disliked the Sicilian food so vehemently—for her young son, and called in, as we have seen, a gay band of young Frenchmen. When urged to try to play a more prominent part in politics, Harry of Navarre, the queen's brother, excused himself on the plea that

"French was necessary" (Falcandus)—it does not follow, however, that it was the predominant language spoken.

This was a time of great prosperity for the island, of blossoming of the arts, of sweet ripeness of culture, as the clear insight and wisdom of Roger bore fruit in civilisation; of good will to all men, whatever their profession or creed, and especially to those likely to add to the sensuous pleasure and refinement of living. Poets and minstrels—French *trouvères*, Provençal troubadours, and Arabian *raouis*—flocked to the court of the comely and well-beloved young king, and the fame of his poetic court spread far and wide, and still finds a typical echo in a fourteenth-century commentator of Dante, who speaks of William II. as loving his subjects "di dilettazione reale, la quale fae differenzia dalla iniqua volontà tirannica, e teneali in tanto trastullo, pace e diletto, che si poteva estimare un paradiso terrestre."

To all these languages we must add Hebrew. Scattered in little groups round their synagogues all over Palermo there were many Jews. There is a most curious, almost inexplicable, quadrilingual inscription from 1148, preserved in the Museum, commemorative of Anna, "Mother of Grisando, cleric of Roger, King of Sicily and Italy"—in Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew. Another curious inscription is the well-known trilingual one, now put up on the outer wall of the campanile of the Cappella Palatina, describing the marvels of a clock (*clepsydra*) made for King Roger, in terse Latin, fulsome Greek, and flowery Arabic.

The King's Chancery was bilingual. Decrees or other documents were written in either Greek or Latin—Latin gradually supplanting Greek—according to the supposed nationality of the persons they concerned. The notaries and protonotaries of this Chancery were very important personages, a real twelfth-century *artisocratie de la robe*. According to Kehr there was no Arabic department of the Chancery. All the deeds written in Arabic concerned land tenure and were issued by a special administrative office taken over from the Arabs and known in Arabic as the *Diwan-el-Takik-el-Mamur*, in Latin as the *Dohane*, or *Duane*, *Secretis*. Questions regarding feudalism were regulated by a government office called the *Dohane Baronum*, this name showing, as Professor Garufi has pointed out, the grafting in of feudal institutions on the old indigenous ones.

Two departments or features of the busy active life within the walls of the castle are of special interest to the social historian: the Board of Geography and the *tirâz*.

During Roger's reign and the first few years of the reign of William I., there was what may be called a Board of Geography, superintended by Edrisi, the great geographer mentioned above, on lines laid down by King Roger himself, whose keen mind found a special delight in all pertaining to this delightful branch of knowledge, in which, as we know, the Arabs excelled. Disgusted with the existing *compendii*—as learned men have been since his day—this king determined, says Edrisi, to compile a Universal Geography based on the account of practical men. So men experienced in travel were called in or made welcome from all parts, their accounts were compared, those that agreed were accepted, the others rejected ; while older written accounts were also evidently made use of. After fifteen years of this sifting of evidence, " during which time there did not pass a day," says Edrisi in his preface, " when the king did not take active part in the work," a map was prepared and finally transported on to a huge planisphere of silver (divided up into segments, according to Amari). A description was also written by Edrisi of the countries figured on the planisphere, their physical features, their products, various kinds of buildings, monuments and the arts that flourished ; their exports and imports ; the climate and the characteristics of the inhabitants, their nature, religion, ornaments, dress and language."

It is from this text, known as "The Nozhat," or "The Book of Roger," or "The Delight of him who loves to travel," that we have quoted at some length in the following chapter.

The department of the royal palace that has attracted most attention, from Hugh Falcandus onwards, is the *tirâz* or royal workshop of weaving and embroidery, partly for the surpassing beauty of the products, partly for the piquant suggestion that this department was really a masked harem. As a matter of fact, this official workshop existed in Palermo before the coming of the Normans; it was an institution in vogue at the courts of Eastern Saracen and Byzantine princes—something answering to the workshops at Sèvres and Les Gobelins of the French kings—a workshop for the use of the king and for the production of unique and costly presents "of truly regal magnificence." To this workshop King Roger devoted much attention. When Admiral George of Antioch was sent on his raid to Greece in 1147, he was especially enjoined to bring home Greek weavers and female slaves, skilful in weaving. . . . Only it is also said, in one place, that they must be beautiful (*formose*).

The products of these looms will be described later.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE

Our best guide to the splendour of Palermo and the flourishing condition of the island during the twelfth century, the best introduction also to the following chapters dealing with the marvels of art during this period, will be the enthusiastic accounts of some contemporary writers.

Let us take the three most important and famous ones, and first hear Edrisi. He is compiling a geography, not writing a record of travel, and there is thus a certain sameness about his descriptions of prosperous towns with stupendous palaces, broad main streets, baths and fondaks (caravansaries), all the pleasures and all the comforts of life; a flourishing commerce, an industrious population, fertile corn-fields, and, generally, "luxuriant gardens" or "gardens abounding in fruits"—when on or near the sea, with an excellent harbour to which ships come from all parts.

The principal secondary cities, Messina, Catania, Siracuse (with its two ports), are, however, well described and differentiated; the situation of places like Trapani, Castrogiovanni, and Randazzo excellently characterised; certain little precise indications show that all the accompanying description of fertility and prosperity is a statistician's repetition of actual facts, not a mere string of mediæval *clichés*. The old Roman theatre at Taormina is mentioned with admiration, as are the antiquities of Girgenti and other places, as testifying to their high importance in ancient times; the cathedral, the churches and the famous elephant at Catania; the excellent fish of the rivers Salso, Simeto, &c.; the tunny fisheries of certain seaport towns, the coral fisheries of Trapani, the timber exported from Randazzo, on the well-timbered slopes of Etna, and Aci; the vineyards round Paternò on the southern slopes of Etna, and in several other places; the cold air of Castrogiovanni and mild climate of Trapani, and early harvests in the hot soil of Etna at Aci; the pitch, tar, and timber exported from this same Aci. Caltagirone is renowned for its honey, another place in the interior for milk and butter. Cotton and henna are grown at Partinico, excellent flax at Milazzo. *Paste* (macaroni, vermicelli, and the like—that precious heritage of the Arabs) are exported in great quantities to all parts from Trabia; almonds, dried figs, and carobs from Carini, with which products "ships and boats are loaded for many lands." At San Marco "the air is perfumed by the violets growing on all sides; much silk is produced; the beach is fine; ships are built with the timber from the adjoining woods." Mediæval Sicily, we may note, was celebrated for its magnificent forests. A tenth-century Christian author especially mentions the cedars, cypresses and tall and stately stone-pines of Sicily. Edrisi mentions them in several places, and also describes rivers as "abounding in excellent big fish," or "having many mills," which are now mainly represented by dried-up river-beds and occasional disastrous inundations.

Palermo is described by Edrisi at length as the greatest and finest metropolis of the world, "the city of all the elegances." "To put it briefly, this city turns the heads of all those who see it. . . . It has buildings of such beauty that travellers flock there, attracted by the fame of the marvels of architecture, the exquisite workmanship, the admirable conceptions of art."

His general description of the topographical situation of Palermo agrees with that of our other authorities, and need, therefore, not be given in full, but we note that he describes the outer city as "enclosed by walls," and mentions the high walls and impregnable position of the Cassaro or inner city. The Cassaro is described as embracing three main streets; the principal one, the present Corso, "full of towering palaces, high and superb hostels, churches, fondaks, baths, and shops of great merchants." Of the (Rogerian) cathedral or principal mosque he says that "it was at one time a Christian church and has now again been given back to the worship to which it was dedicated by the ancients." It is beautiful beyond all conception for "fanciful inventions, exquisite workmanship, rare and novel varieties of figures, gildings, colours and calligraphic ornament" (*i.e.* inscriptions). Of the Royal Palace he says: "In the most elevated part of this Cassaro, the redoubted King Roger has built a castle of little stones [referring to the mosaics, according to Amari] and cut stone, well disposed architecturally, furnished with high towers and well fortified with turrets and escarpments; containing palaces and well-built halls; notable for fine architecture, admirable and unexcelled calligraphic ornaments and for the elegant images . . . collected there. . . . All travellers . . . say outright that there are [nowhere] buildings more marvellous than those of Palermo, nor sites more exquisite than her pleasure gardens."

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Our next guide is a cultivated Arabian traveller known by his full name as Abu al Husayn ibn Jubair. This highly cultivated and keenly observant Spanish Arab, who visited the island in 1184–5 on his way back from a pilgrimage to Mecca and travels in the East, undertaken out of mere intelligent curiosity, was a very different person from the gossip-loving, globe-trotting merchant from Bagdad, ibn Hauqal, whose description of Palermo in the tenth century was given above.

A keen observer and a writer of a style at once vivid, quaint, and elegant (or so Amari says), ibn Jubair evidently kept a journal, writing down his impressions while they were fresh with absolute sincerity, careless of seeming discrepancies.*

The chapters relating to Sicily given by Amari begin:

"The month of the blessed Ramadan (Dec. 6, 1184–Jan. 4, 1185). May God give us His blessing and His grace, through His bounty and generosity. There is no other God but Him."

Then follows a long vivid account, in bright, crisp sentences, which must be condensed here, of the hardships of travel by sea in those days. First the provisions gave out, as they had been two months at sea, while the voyage generally only took from ten days to a fortnight, so that the wariest had only laid in provisions for a month. . . . After this had been remedied when they were off Calabria, where the Christians went ashore and bought provisions, selling their surplus at exorbitant prices to the Muslims, the wind rose suddenly towards nightfall one evening and drove them up the Straits of Messina, where the "water rushes along like the current of Al Arim and seethes as if in a cauldron." The ship was tossed from side to side; the master commanded the sails to be lowered; when the mainsail could not be lowered, such was the force of the wind, he tried to cut it in pieces with his knife. During this manœuvre the ship ran ashore with her keel and the two rudders that are like the two legs that support the ship. Then there arose a dreadful cry and all knew that they had met with the final blow, which no courage can ward off. The Christians bewailed themselves in despair; the Muslims were calmly and piously resigned to the will of God. . . . Wind and waves beat against the sides of the ship, one of the rudders broke, an anchor was cast, but had to have its cable cut. Certain that their hour had come they (the Mohammedans) prepared their souls for death . . . but the women and children of the Rûms only cried the louder calling for help—these people being all lacking in resignation to the Divine will. . . . A boat was lowered and reached land but was shattered to pieces against the cliffs. Then all hope seemed indeed lost, yet in the midst of the fear caused by all those perils the rosy dawn brought help from God. "Can it be true?" they asked one another, seeing in front of them, not half a mile distant, the city of Messina! . . . whereupon they admired once more the power of the Highest and the ways He chooses to fulfil His ends—and recited an appropriate hemistich. . . . When the sun had risen, boats came out to help them—and the report spread to the city of their danger. William himself (the Second), the king, came in person to see the piteous case . . . and noticing that the poor Mohammedans were left on board, not being able to pay the high charges of the boatmen, he sent them one hundred rubai of his money. After more pious praise for their salvation our author says that it should be counted as a grace of God that the king was at Messina. Otherwise they would have been robbed of all they had, and worse would indeed have befallen them, as it often happened that shipwrecked Mohammedans were made slaves, according to the wicked custom of the country. Our pilgrim then goes on to describe Messina—"may God give her back to the Mohammedans."

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* There being no English version of these delightful travels I have tried my hand at a free rendering into English of all the more descriptively interesting passages relating to Sicily, after Amari's and Schiaparelli's Italian versions. The better to preserve at least something of the vivid impressionism of the original I have been sparing of comment or cross-reference.

This city, he says, is the emporium of the infidel merchants, the goal of ships that plough the sea, coming from all regions; but obscured by the shadows of infidelity. There are no Muslims settled in Messina, she is full of worshippers of the Cross, so that one cannot find breathing room there; the city cannot even contain the whole number of its inhabitants. Full of dirt and squalor, repellent and inhospitable, yet having rich and well frequented markets; there is in abundance all that one can wish for of the comforts of life, and you are safe there by night and by day, even if your face, your purse and your tongue proclaim you a foreigner.

Messina lies resting on hillsides running parallel with the moats of the city; towards the south it faces the sea. Most marvellous, surpassing all other harbours, is the port of Messina; the largest ships approach so near as almost to touch land, merely putting out a plank, on which the porters pass on board with their burdens on their shoulders. Nor are boats used for loading and unloading except when the ships are lying at anchor at some distance. Thus you may see the ships tied up along the shore, like horses tied to their posts in a stable, and this owing to the immense depth of the sea in these Straits, which separate Messina from the mainland, and are three miles wide.

Opposite there is a town called Reggio, the head of a large province.

He describes Etna as "of boundless height so that it wears summer and winter a mantle of clouds and a turban of snow. The fertility of this island surpasses all description, suffice it to say that she may be called the daughter of Spain for the extent of arable land, for fertility and riches . . . copious in every product of the soil, and teeming in fruit of every kind. But the worshippers of the Cross dwell there. They go about the hills and dwell in enjoyment on the plains, side by side with the Muslims, who are left undisturbed in the possession of their estates and farms. The Christians have craftily made use of their industry and skill, despoiling them of the riches which they earned [formerly] by tilling the land. . . . May God prosper them [the Muslims] and help them. . . . The hills round Messina seem so many gardens abounding in apples, chestnuts, walnuts, plums and other fruit. The Mohammedans in Messina are only a handful of servants—it thus happens that the Muslim traveller is left lonely here, like a wild beast. . . ."

After a mention of Palermo as the principal dwelling-place of the Muslim citizens, and some other places where they are found, there follows the famous description of the personality and court of William II.

". . . The King of Sicily is remarkable for his good conduct and because he makes much use of the Muslims, and employs as courtiers eunuchs, who mostly keep their faith a secret yet are firm in the law of Islam. The king puts much faith in the Muslims and trusts his affairs to them, even those of most moment; thus, for instance, the head of his kitchen is a Muslim, and he keeps a bodyguard of Mohammedan negro slaves with a captain of that race. His vizier and his chamberlains are always chosen from among these eunuchs ; he has a large number of them, and they are the employés in the public affairs and at the court. In their persons one sees the splendour of this kingdom; they wear sumptuous clothes, and have agile horses, and none of them are without a following of familiars and clients.

"This king possesses magnificent palaces and delectable gardens, especially in the aforesaid capital of the kingdom. In Messina he has a palace as white as a dove, which dominates the beach ; here many courtiers and handmaidens wait upon the king. In troth no Christian king is more luxurious nor lives more delightfully and well.

"He resembles Muslim kings in the habit of

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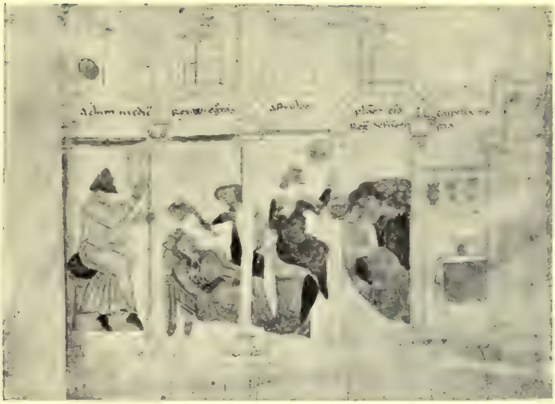

WILLIAM II. ON HIS DEATH-BED
To the left, "Achim medicus," to the right "Astrologus."
(From the miniatures to Pietro da Eboli's "Carmen.")

p. 59

living sunk in the pleasures of kingship, also in the ordering of the administration, in manners and customs, in the gradation of his optimates, the magnificence of his court and the display of pomp. Great is his realm. He has doctors and astrologers whom he honours greatly, finding so much pleasure in intercourse with them, that when he hears of any of these learned men travelling in his dominion, he has them retained [and brought to him] and gives them large sums to make them forget their country. May God in His grace keep every Mohammedan from this temptation. King William is thirty years of age or thereabouts. May God prolong his life and give him health, for the well-being of the Muslims!

" Another notable fact that is told of this prince is that he can read and write Arabic. One of his trusted men has told us that his *alâmah* * is ' Praised be the Lord as is His due,' and that the *alâmah* of his father was ' Praised be the Lord for all His benefits.' The handmaidens and concubines that he keeps in his palace are all Muslims. Indeed, the same man by name Yahyâ (John), one of the attendants of the *tirâz*, who embroidered in gold the garments of the king, told us another not less marvellous fact, namely, that the Christian women of Frankish race living in the palace become Mohammedans, converted by the handmaidens we mentioned. The king knows nothing of it. These women are very zealous in good works.

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* The royal motto used according to the Arab custom as a superscription to deeds in Arabic.

"The same Yahyâ told us that once, when Sicily was shaken by violent earthquakes, this polytheist [meaning King William] when wandering scared about his palaces, heard nothing on all sides but the voices of the women and the servitors uttering prayers to Allah and His prophet. All were affright at the sight of the king, but he bade them take comfort, saying: May each of you invoke the Being whom he worships and in whom he believes.

"The courtiers who live in this kingdom, the great ones of the State, and the officers of the Government are Mohammedans. Without any exception they fast at the proper times, personally or by proxy; they dispense alms to gain the favour of God; ransom prisoners, educate and give away in marriage Mohammedan children; all do good works according to their means. All this by the grace of Allah; may He be exalted and praised. . . ."

Yet our author goes on to tell how one of the principal and most worthy personages sent for them, and after having looked round carefully in every corner of the hall, begged for some token from the holy places they had visited, adding, "You are free to profess Islam, to enjoy the things you care for, and also to make money, when it so pleases God, by your dealings. Think of us who must hide our faith, trembling for our lives, and only worship God in secret, unable to observe His precepts, kept as we are in the realm of the Infidel, who has thrown over us the bonds of servitude."

Then follows the account of the journey to Palermo by sea. They sailed along the coast, near enough to discern all with their eyes. God sent them a gentle wind from the East that propelled the vessel very pleasantly. As they passed they let their eyes run along a panorama of fields and villages, castles and strongholds perched on the tops of the mountains. To the right they noticed nine islands, the Æolian islands, rising like ghosts from the sea not far from Sicily, two of which sent up perpetual fire. Indeed they perceived the smoke coming up out of both, and at night there issued a red fire which sent into the air tongues of flame.

After describing the marvels of the volcano, he describes the city of Cefalù—"may Allah give it back to the Muslims! This seaport town abounds in products of the land, enjoys great economic prosperity, is surrounded by vineyards and other cultivation, and provided with well-placed markets. A certain number of Muslims live there. Above it there towers a cliff large and round, from which there rises a fortress more formidable than any that was ever seen, and fortified against any armed fleet that might assail it coming from the Muslims; may God help them always!" . . . Going on to Termini ("which may Allah give back to the Muslims"), he describes it as placed in a site lovelier than that of Cefalù; it is strong and high up astride over a spur of mountain, over the sea. The Muslims have in Termini a large quarter with mosques. The city has a fortress high and well defended; at the foot of this there gushes out a thermal spring, which spares the inhabitants the construction of a bath. The country is fertile and teeming with the fruits of the earth; and likewise the whole island, which may be called one of the most wonderful regions that God has created."

The wind being contrary they decided to make the rest of their journey to Palermo on foot. The road they took seemed a market, so animated was it and full of people coming and going. The bands of Christians that they met were ready with greetings and very friendly; their behaviour and their tolerance were such as to lead the unwary into temptation (to love them). "May God in His power and bounty save from this temptation all the people of Mohammed ; peace be with them ! "

Being tired they passed the night at the citadel or castle town of Kasr Sad—now the uninhabited hill of La Cannita—which he describes as "situated on the coast, grandiose and ancient in construction ; dating from the time of the rule of the Muslims in the island, it has been and will remain, by the divine grace, the sojourn of the Faithful. This place, round which there lie many graves of pious and God-fearing Muslims, is renowned as a holy spot, so that people flock to it from all parts."

Opposite it there is a spring called Ayn al Magunnah. It is closed with a stout gate of iron ; within the gate there are dwellings, with lofty belvederes and well-arranged rooms, so that it may be called a place of abode furnished with all the comforts of life. At the top one admires a mosque, one of the most splendid in the world (this in Sicily, A.D. 1184, by one who had seen the marvels of the East) ; oblong, with elongated arches, with the floor covered with clean matting, of such fair workmanship that their equal is not seen anywhere. In this mosque there hang about forty lamps in sundry fashions of brass or of glass. In front of the mosque there is a wide terrace that runs all round the top story of the castle ; at the foot is a well of sweet water.

"We passed the night sweetly and well in the said mosque, where we heard the call of the muezzin that we had wished for long in vain. Greatly were we honoured by those who dwelt in the town. They had an iman who recited with them the obligatory prayers and those of the blessed month of the Ramadan.

"Not far from Kasr Sad, about a mile along the road that leads to the capital, there is another similar 'Kasr,' called Kasr Gafar, within which there is a tank [or lake: *siqayah*] fed by a spring of sweet water.

"Along the road we saw churches of the Christians, with hospitals for the sick of their race.* In the cities they have others like the maristan of the Muslims, such as we had already seen at Acre and Tyre, and marvelled over the care they took of them. After the morning prayer we set out for Palermo. But when we were about to pass in they forbade us and conducted us to a gate near the castle of the Frankish king (may Allah save the Muslims from his rule!). We were taken before one of his functionaries [*mustahlaf*] to be questioned as to the scope of our travels, as they do here with all wayfarers."

Mr. G. D. Hornblower, of Cairo, very kindly furnishes the following valuable translation, direct from the Arabic, of the important passage describing the Royal Castle and great hall, or *Aula Regia*, as Hugh Falcandus has it, connected in some way with the castle:

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* Evidently referring to S. Giovanni dei Lepprosi.

"We passed through spacious piazzas and doors and kingly courtyards, and saw lofty palaces and well-arranged exercise-grounds and gardens, also raised benches for the servants . . ." (. . . and were duly dazzled and bewildered and recalled the words of Allah—may He be praised and glorified! "If it were not that mankind would become one sect [of infidels] verily we had given unto them who believe not in the Merciful roofs of silver to their houses and stairs [of silver] by which they might mount thereto" (Koran, ch. 43, 32). . . .) Then: "Among other objects we saw a council-chamber in a spacious courtyard, surrounded by a garden round which was arranged an arcade. This council-chamber took up the whole length of the courtyard and we wondered at its length and the height of its belvederes and were told that it was used for the meals of the king and his friends; facing it are the arcade and the raised benches where sit his officers, commissioners, and servants. . . ."

"This high functionary came to meet us, leaning on two of his men, who walked beside him and carried the train of his robe. We saw an old man with long white mustachioes, majestic in his bearing; who, speaking Arabic fluently, asked us whence we came and for what purpose, and hearing our reply he beamed upon us, bidding us go on our way, with so much courtesy and such a profusion of good wishes for our welfare, that we marvelled at his kindly behaviour. The very first thing that he had asked us was whether we knew anything about the news from Constantinople; but we had no news to give him. We shall have more to say about these matters of Constantinople. . . . Upon leaving the castle we entered a covered way, along which we passed for some little space without hindrance until we came to a church ot immense size. We were told that this arcade serves as the king's passage when he betakes himself to this temple.

"Description of the capital of Sicilia—may Allah give it back to the Muslims!

"It is the metropolis of these regions; it combines in one two prizes: prosperity and magnificence. Here you will find everything that you desire, be it good or fair, mature or green. Ancient and elegant, splendid and passing fair, she rises before you like an enchantress, enthroned among her open spaces and her plains that are like unto one garden. With spacious alleys and main thoroughfares she dazzles the eyes with the rare loveliness of her aspect. A stupendous city, like Cordova in her architecture, her buildings are all of cut stone, a clear river divides her in two, four springs well up alongside. The king found in her every pleasure of the earth and therefore made her the capital of his Frankish realm—may Allah exterminate them! The [pleasure] palaces of the king encircle the city as a necklace clasps the throat of a maiden with well-filled bosom, so that the prince, without ever going outside these lovely places and pleasure grounds, can pass from one to the other of the gardens and open courts of Palermo. What delights he has there—may God prevent him from enjoying them! What halls and palaces and loggie and belvederes! And how many monasteries belong to him which he has adorned with buildings and endowed with large estates? For how many churches has he not had crosses cast in gold and in silver? But it lies in the power of Allah to make Fortune ere long return benign to this island. He can give it back to the true Faith and rescue it by His grace and power, from danger to safety; for He is Almighty!

"There are some vestiges of the Faith among the Muslims of this city; they keep in good condition the greater number of their mosques, they say their prayers at the call of the muezzin, have quarters of their own in which they dwell apart from the Christians; all the markets, too, are kept by them.

"But they are not allowed to congregate on Fridays, the *hutbah* [sermon and public prayer] being forbidden them. The *hutbah* is only permitted at the annual festivals, and then they pray for the Abbâsid Caliph. They have a caid who renders judgment in disputes that have arisen among them, and a congregational mosque in which they congregate for prayer and flock to see the illumination in this sacred month. Their mosques are innumerable; most of them serve as schools for teachers of the Koran. In general the Muslims of Palermo keep themselves aloof from their brethren bound in servitude to the Infidel, and lacking safety for their possessions, their women and their children. May God in His goodness comfort these miserable ones with some special grace!

"One of the aspects in which this city resembles Cordova, as one thing always resembles another, at least in one respect, is this, that Palermo has, in the midst of the new City, an old City called the old Kasr [*Cassaro*]; such being exactly the topography of Cordova—may God protect her! In this old Kasr there are palaces which seem castles in fine masonry from which there rise in air lofty belvederes that dazzle one's eyes with their loveliness.

"One of the most noteworthy of the monuments of the Christians in this city is the 'Church of the Antiochene.' We saw it on Christmas Day, which is one of their principal festivals, hence there was a great number of men and women gathered there. This building offered a sight which words fail to describe, for this is the most beautiful monument in the world. The inner walls are gilded, or rather are all one sheet of gold, with panels of marble in colours, of which the like was never seen, all inlaid with little pieces of mosaic of gold, framed in foliage in green mosaic ; above there is an order of gilded glass windows, that dazzled the eyesight with the brightness of their rays and led one's soul into a temptation of the kind against which we prayed to God for help. We were told that the founder of this church, from whom it has taken its name (George the Antiochene, Admiral of the Admirals to Roger II.), spent on it whole hundredweights of gold. He was vizier to the ancestor of this polytheist king. This church has a belfry, supported on columns of marble in various colours and surmounted by a cupola which rests on other columns, they call it the campanile of the columns—and it is one of the most marvellous buildings that were ever seen—may God in His grace and power ennoble it ere long with the call of the muezzin.

"The bearing and dress of the women of this city is the same as that of the Muslim women: elegant of speech [*i.e.* talking Arabic], wrapped in mantles and veiled like these, they had come out for the aforesaid festival, with gowns of silk mixed with gold, elegant mantles and veils of various colours; they wore gilt boots, and proceeded towards their churches overloaded with all the ornaments in use among the Muslim women, necklaces, dyes and perfumes. So that we recalled as a literary jest, the words of the poet:

"'By my troth who goes into a church meets antelopes and gazelles there.' But let us fly to God and leave a description which verges on scurrility and leads to the vanity of jesting; may He keep us from putting on paper things blameworthy, for He—may he ever be praised—is a powerful God."

They stayed in Palermo some days in one ot the hostels where Mohammedans were wont to stay, and then set out for Trapani, where they hoped to find a ship that would take them to Spain. On the road they passed by an uninterrupted succession of villages and farms and were greatly struck, again, by the extent and fertility of the cultivated fields; they slept at Alcamo, "large, opulent, provided with a market and mosques"; and left Alcamo at daybreak. Passing by a hot well-spring by the wayside, near certain renowned hot baths, they got off their horses and refreshed themselves with a bath. Trapani (" May God give it back to the Muslims ! ") is described as " small, surrounded by walls, and as white as a dove. Its harbour is counted as one of the best and most convenient for shipping. . . . Between this town and Tunis it is only a day and a night by sea. . . . Here there are markets, baths and every comfort of the towns, though Trapani seems the plaything of the waves, for the sea surrounds it on three sides, and the neck that connects it with the land is very narrow. The inhabitants are Muslims and Christians ; each of these two sects has its own temples, mosques and churches. At a short distance from the isthmus towards the east with a slight leaning to the north there rises a great mountain, very high and surmounted by an isolated rock. On this rock is a fortress of the Rûms, to which one passes by a bridge from the mountain, and near the fortress there is a large village, also inhabited by the Rûms. It is said that the women here are the most beautiful of all on the island—may God make them the captives of the Muslims ! It is called Gabal Hamid (now Monte San Giuliano). The ascent is possible from one side only ; therefore the Christians think that on this mountain depends, if God so wills it, the conquest of the island, and by no means will they allow a single Muslim to go up there. For the same reason they have fortified strongly this formidable citadel. At the first rumour of danger they would put their women in safety there, they would cut the bridge and a great chasm would separate them from any one on the top of the near-lying mountain."

At Trapani they found two sailing vessels bound one for Ceuta and one for Spain, and took part in the celebration of the end of Ramadan, which took place in the *musallâ* or open space set apart for that purpose, whither the Muslims betook themselves preceded by the magistrate set to judge them, and returned to the sound of tabors and horns. Which astonished them greatly, also the tolerance of the Christians who stood there looking on.

They had already engaged their passages and were laying in their provisions when there arrived an order from the King of Sicily forbidding all sailing vessels to depart before he had collected and fitted out a fleet he was preparing. Hearing this the Genoese masters of the sailing vessel went on board without loss of time to be out of the way of the *wali* (official) ; it ended in their bribing him and remaining on board awaiting a favourable wind.

Then follows an interesting account, too long to be included here, of all the gossip rife about the escape of this navy, the news from overseas, and rumours of wars, bruited about in this seaport town while our travellers were kept waiting. Among other things there is a little romantic love story telling how a certain Byzantine prince fell in love with his cousin, renowned for her beauty, and not being able to marry her, as marriage between relatives is not allowed by the Rûms, Love the archer, the passion that makes one deaf and blind, the ecstasy which drives the lover to the end most desired, carried away this youth so that he bore off his cousin and fled with her to the Emir Masùd, Prince of Darûb of Konieh . . . where he embraced the Muslim faith, as also his cousin, even going so far as to trample the cross under foot. Then he married his cousin, and consummated his love, after which he led a Muslim army to Constantinople, took the city and slaughtered fifty thousand Rûms there. . . . Our traveller also hears a great deal ("many piteous cases") of the sad lot of the people of Mohammed living with the worshippers of the Cross ("May God exterminate them!"), how the King even uses violence to make them abandon the true religion . . . for instance, persecuting a certain jurisconsult of Palermo of the name of ibn Zurah until he forced him to pretend to deny Islam and let himself be engulfed by the Christian religion.

. . . He converted into a church the mosque that he owned opposite his house. (" May God save us all from the effects of apostasy and the consequences of error ! ") . . . Another prominent Mohammedan, indeed the head and lord of all the Mohammedans of the island, came to Trapani while our travellers were there. This was the Caid Abu al Kasim ibn Hammûd, surnamed ibn al Hagar, " one of the nobles of this island who have inherited the quality of lordship from father to son . . . greatly praised for his virtue and charity towards the Muslims —ransoming prisoners and giving largess to poor wayfarers and pilgrims so that the whole town rejoiced at his coming. This man had lost the favour of the tyrant through intrigues, had been imprisoned in his house, and had all his palaces confiscated and also the possessions inherited from his ancestors. . . . Latterly he had been reinstated into favour by the tyrant, who had entrusted to him important Government affairs . . . meet work for the slave who is deprived of all liberty and riches."

He expressed a wish to meet ibn Jubair and they had a talk, and the great man said that he and all his only desired to sell all they had and thus be liberated from their woes and free to live in Muslim lands. When our pilgrim parted from ibn Hammûd, he wept and made them weep. " The nobility of his lineage, the singular gifts of his character, the fine earnestness of his life, his charity towards relatives, his liberality, the beauty of his person and his soul, moved us deeply. In Palermo we had seen belonging to him, to his brothers and his clan, palaces that seemed magnificent, and stately castles."

Nor are further instances lacking of the persecutions to which the Muslims were subjected by this time. Thus it is told that when a man loses his temper with his wife or his son, or a woman with her daughter, and they in a fit of anger throw themselves into a church, they are made Christians and baptized, nor can a man see his son again nor a woman her daughter in any other guise—so that those with insight fear that it will e'en happen to the Muslims of Sicilia as it happened to those of the island of Crete . . . (when all the inhabitants, what with one thing and what with another, were forced to become Christians). . . . "May the word of damnation fall over the Infidel . . . !"

Another piteous case recounted was the following, to which our pilgrim was witness. One of the first in the city sent his own son to one of the pilgrims asking him to accept his young daughter for his wife if she pleased him, or to give her in marriage to one of his countrymen, but in any case to take her away with him, she being gladly willing to leave father and brothers, if she could only sojourn in a Muslim land. Her father and brothers were willing to let her go and hoped themselves also to take refuge in a Mohammedan country, when sailing vessels were again allowed to depart —and with some further reflections on this case the account of ibn Jubair's stay in Sicily ends.

It will be seen that this account of ibn Jubair's visit was written at a most dramatic moment in the life of the Saracens on the island, when superb mosques with "forty sundry lamps of brass and glass" (would that some of them had survived) and magnificent palaces were still standing, when Arab functionaries were still in high favour, but the position of the Mohammedans was undermined. This ibn Hammûd was the last of the Arabian *grands seigneurs.*

Barely six years later, during the disturbances following upon the death of William II., there was a popular uprising against them in Palermo, with much slaughter, whereupon the Muslims fled to the mountain strongholds still held by the men of their race, where they were joined by large numbers of runaway Mohammedan serfs. They were pacified and brought back to their civic duties or their bondage, but there was another and a more serious outbreak, when they formally rebelled, during the last years of the century. After A.D. 1200 they were all driven out of

Palermo. They remained in their mountain strongholds, giving a lot of trouble, until A.D. 1301 when the last remnants of them were deported as slaves to Lucera in Apulia.

* * *

Our last authority is a man of Latin race, and his description of Sicily is written in a form differing widely from the naïve Arabic chronicle of travel. It is one of the rhetorical letters meant to be circulated, in which mediæval scholars aired their political views and their fine Latin prose style. But little is known about the author. He was one Hugh Falcandus, a Sicilian, or more probably a Southern Italian, who spent some years in Sicily at the court of William I., and wrote a brilliant if not impartial *Liber de Regno Sicilie* dealing with the period from 1154 to 1169 and principally, from a partisan point of view, with the conspiracy against the Chancellor Majone of Bari and the events which followed it.

The *Epistola*, indited to his friend Peter, Treasurer of the Cathedral of Palermo, when the news reached him of the death of King William II. (in 1189), is a rhetorical lament, expressing, also, his views on the political situation, and ending with a long passage of what we now should call word-painting, re-evocative of the author's recollections of Palermo and the fair country all round it. "The city," he says, "is situated in the plain; on one side it is continually fretted by the sea, against which, however, the old castle, known as the Castle by the Sea, to weaken the force or the waves, opposes its walls furnished with many towers. But at the other end on the opposite side is situated the new palace, with great industry and marvellous skill built of square-hewn stones outwardly enclosed by a wide circle of walls, and inwardly striking for the splendour of gold and many gems; having here the Pisan Tower, set apart for the custody of the king's treasure, and there the Greek Tower, standing above the quarter of the city known as Kemonia. The centre again is embellished by the part of the palace full ot beauty known as the Joharia, shining with sumptuous ornament of many kinds, where the king is wont to dwell when he desires rest and quiet. Here in the remaining space the chambers all round are set apart for the matrons, maidens and eunuchs that serve the king and the queen. Other smaller palaces there are glittering with fair and varied ornament, where the king discourses in secret with his trusted men of the state of the realm, or receives the leading men to speak of public and important affairs. Nor must one forget the noble workshops where the flocks ot silk are drawn out into threads of many colours and adapted to woven stuffs of many kinds. Here you may see the *amita*, *dimita*, *trimita*,* woven with less skill and cost, or the *eximita* condensing a greater wealth of material. Here the *diarhodon* throws reflexes of fiery glow over the face, there the bluish hue of the *diapisto* delights the eye with its gentle aspect, and here the *exarentasmata*, distinguished by circles of many kinds, crave greater skill in the craftsman and more material, and yet one hesitates about a higher price. Many and varied other ornaments may here be seen ot different colours and sundry kinds, in which gold is interwoven with silk, and the multiform designs enlivened with transparent gems. Daisies, too, are either let entire into cloisons of gold, or perforated and joined together with fine threads and so much elegant industry in the figures that they seem like unto a painting. But on the side, looking towards the city, whoever enters the palace first encounters the Royal Chapel, with a pavement of sumptuous workmanship, walls decorated below with sheets of precious marbles and above with little square stones, some gilt, some of many colours, figuring the history of the Old and the New Testament. The highest summit, further, is adorned with a ceiling of very elegant woodwork, with marvellous variety of painting, and here and there with the splendour of gold.

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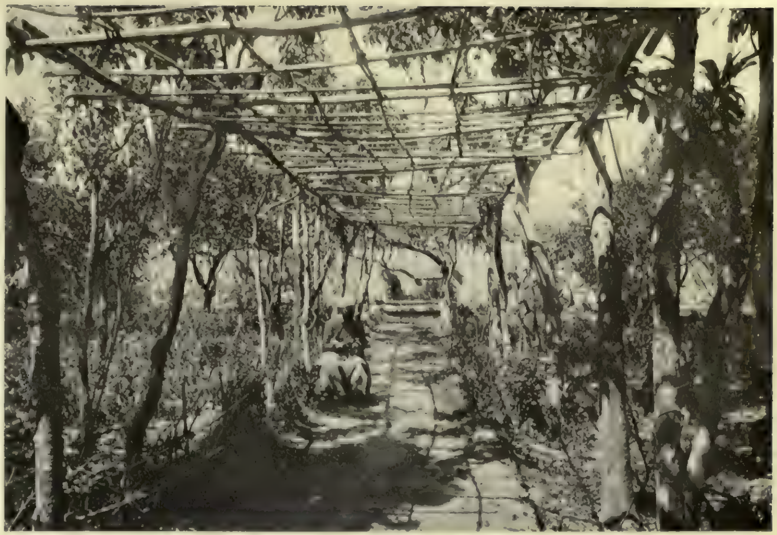
* Stuffs wrought with one, two, or three threads respectively, to the "strings" of the warp. I must refrain from any attempt to explain the more complicated technical terms in use in the *tirâz* of Palermo, picked up by this fine twelfth-century scholar and enthusiastic connoisseur.

"Thus disposed and ordered, this palace, full of every kind of delight and charm, like unto the head above the rest of the body, rises above the city, which, distinct in three parts, contains, one may say, three separate cities. The one which is placed in the middle of the two others, rich in buildings of the noblest structure, is separated to the right and to the left by walls of enormous height from the two others; it is not very wide, but stretches out in length for a greater space, as it two smaller portions of equal circles were joined on to one chord.

"Three principal streets, measuring the whole length of this [inner] city, again divide it. Of these the one in the middle, the Via Marmorea, occupied by things for sale, runs from the upper part of the Via Coperta in a straight line to the Arab Palace and thence to the Lower Gate near [or by] the 'Forum' of the Saracens [*juxta forum Saracenorum*]. Another leads from the Torre Pisana by the Via Coperta to the Archbishop's Palace and thence past the houses of the Admiral Maione to the aforesaid Forum of the Saracens, where it joins on to the Via Marmorea; the third finally runs from the Royal Hall [*Aula Regia*] which is below the Palace, past the house of the Saracen to the mansion of the Count Sylvester and the chapel of the Admiral George, and here bends obliquely to the neighbouring gate of the city. But the part of the [outer] city to the right beginning at the Monastery of San Giovanni near the Palace in the Kemonia quarter is enclosed by walls all the way down to the sea, and the part to the right extending likewise, from near the Palace to the Castle by the Sea, and ending there, is fortified also by a circuit of stout walls. The space that extends between the inner city and the harbour, where the two other parts of the city meet, further contains the Street of the Amalfitans, rich in abundance of foreign merchandise, in which garments of various price and colour are displayed to those wishing to buy, both of silk and of Gallic woollen stuffs.

"But who can ever sufficiently admire the marvellous buildings of this illustrious city, the suave abundance of the springs that well up here and there, the loveliness of the trees, ever green, or the aqueducts that plentifully minister to the wants of the citizens? Who can worthily describe the beauty of the famous plain, which stretches for nearly four miles between the walls of the city and the mountains? Oh happy and for all time celebrated plain, that in her lap bears every kind of tree and fruit; that offers every kind of delight to be found elsewhere; that so enchants every one with the delight of the views she offers, that he who has but seen her can hardly be torn away again by any blandishment. For there you may see happy vineyards rejoicing as well in the plenty of fecund greensward as in robust and flourishing shoots. There you may see gardens to be praised for wonderful variety of fruit, and towers built for pleasure and for the custody of the gardens; here you may see the voluble [water] wheels with buckets that descend and likewise ascend, emptying the wells and filling the adjacent cisterns whence the water runs in little channels to every place, so that the beds being thus irrigated, there may grow the short and narrow cucumbers, the longer melons, the water-melons that approach the form of a sphere, the gourds which spread over a greater space on plaited reeds."

Continuing in the same strain, which it may be well to condense somewhat here, our author mentions the pomegranates, both sweet and sour, the limes, composed of three substances, the outside both by colour and odour being indicative of heat, that which is in the middle, an acid liquid, of cold, VI



TRELLIS OF PLAITED REEDS, 1910

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and that which is between the two of a temperate state; the lemons fitted by their asperity for dressing viands; the oranges (bitter) also full of an acid juice and more fitted to delight the eye with their beauty than meet for this use. He bids us notice that they do not fall even when ripe, so that on the same tree may be found the red fruit of the third year, the green fruit of the second year, and the blossom of the actual year, also that this tree, rich in signs of continuous growth, is not deformed by sterile old age, nor deprived of its foliage by the cold of winter. Further, the walnuts, the almonds, the various kinds of figs, the olives, yielding the oil fitted for dressing viands and for keeping up the light in the lamps, and the pod (*Siliquarum vaginulæ*) with its ignoble fruit which by a certain insipid sweetness pleases rustics and children. It is better, he says, to admire the very high palms and the dates that hang from the trees, near to the top. Finally he mentions the fields of marvellous canes, by the natives called honey-canes, from the sweetness of the juice that they contain. If this juice be boiled diligently and well it becomes almost like unto honey, but if it be boiled more perfectly it becomes as the substance of sugar. But the common kinds of fruit, and those that they have with them (in South Italy ?), he esteems it superfluous to add to the number (here mentioned).

CHAPTER V

COUNTRY LIFE

It may interest my readers to know something about the condition of the country population at the time when Hugh Falcandus wrote his famous description of the flourishing aspect of the island.

The condition of this Sicilian peasantry under Norman rule shows the same main features as that of the twelfth century elsewhere in feudal Europe at this time. There is a class of real serfs, given or sold with the land like so much live-stock; a class of semi-free villains or small tenant-farmers, some bound to the soil but not all; there were varying degrees of liberty. Also there are mentions in documents and Codes of Custom surviving later, hinting at the existence of a class of free *possessores*. There is evidence of the gradual confusion and merging into one of all these classes and the gradual abolition of technical servitude, while the abuses and usurpations of the feudal lords during the late twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries tended to make the general condition of the Sicilian peasantry rather worse than it was before. In all this the condition of the long-suffering Sicilian and Southern Italian rural population differed then, as it differs now, from that of the free well-to-do peasantry of Tuscany and Upper Italy.

It would be a mistake, however, to take for granted, as has been done by some sentimental historians with Socialist leanings, that this " wicked " system was deliberately introduced by the Normans. Complicated institutions like servitude and villainage are not applied ready-made anywhere. They are products of slow growth, due to a variety of causes which we must not stop to discuss here—all the more that the history of villainage in Sicily is still unwritten, while the question was even more complicated there than elsewhere, owing to the successive occupation of the island by settlers and conquerors of widely differing races.

The Normans, moreover, as we have seen, took things as they found them, and were great in the art of letting well alone. The fact that the Normans in Sicily inherited so much of the marvellous " skill " of the Arabs in market gardening and small farming is moreover surely proof enough that there was no violent break in the rural traditions of the island.

There may have been a tendency to aggravate, in some ways, the condition of the class of the unfree by applying the Norman feudal point of view to similar but not identical conditions—especially with regard to the seigneurial system of indirect taxation ; thus one of the monopolies instituted and claimed by Count Roger was that of the mills.

There was also a distinct tendency to widen the basis of servitude by giving conquered rural Mohammedan populations the choice between being sold into slavery or settled on the land as serfs. But, on the other hand, "agricultural labour" was insufficient in a country depopulated by thirty years of warfare and the immigration *en masse* of all the lower-class Muslims who could manage to get away. So colonies of Continental Italians were called in—these "Lombard" colonies that still preserve a dialect, a costume, and other survivals of their own—and settled on abandoned lands on favourable terms. The conditions were thus complicated from the outset.

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To what race or races did this servile population belong ? Hugh Falcandus says scornfully that the only *villani* in Sicily, paying an obnoxious annual tax, were the Greeks and the Saracens. This verdict is endorsed by recent historians on philological evidence ; as a matter of fact the numberless names of serfs on the rolls are either Greek or Saracen, with a very few Latin ones.

What does this mean ? Surely not literally a servile population composed exclusively of beautiful Greeks, like the fine types one sees sometimes at Taormina, or swarthy Orientals, like the Arab types from the Conca d'Oro that one sees on market days in Palermo, or the fierce-looking Berber population of Girgenti ? . . . The majority of the Sicilian peasants still bear the racial type ot the primitive Siculi. These Sikelians could not have disappeared at the time we are writing of, though they had long since become Greek in language and name, just as many of them later, and their Greek Christian co-sufferers of other races, were lost sight of among the Arabs or Berbers, when the Normans came, through having adopted the creed, language and names of their Mahommedan masters. There must also have been, in the same way, a certain percentage of the old Latin, *i.e.* Sikelian, rural population Romanised during the long years of Roman dominion, lost sight of among the later Byzantine Greeks. But this, I am aware, is treading on dangerous ground. . . .

* * *

There were then varying forms of servitude known in Sicily, merging one into the other here as elsewhere. Without entering on minutiæ that would lay beyond my province there is no doubt that lowest of all in the social scale were the serfs entered on the rolls (in Italian, *servi iscritti sulle platee*), who are always mentioned as a class apart. They were not merely bound to the soil, but given or sold with the soil (sometimes with their offspring) like so much live-stock (and very welcome presents, to bishops and abbots). Indeed one of the clauses of the Code of Custom of Palermo (*De servis fugitivis et animalibus aberrantibus et recuperatine ipsorum*) relates to "runaway serfs and stray beasts," while a clause of the Code of Custom of Corleone (beginning "*Si quis emat servam vel servam, mulum vel mulam vel eiusque generis alterius animalis* . . .") enumerates them with horses, mules and other kinds of animals. Severe edicts were issued from time to time, commanding the restitution of these runaway serfs by those who harboured them, feudal barons or others. (The runaways did not all, however, as we shall see, belong to the class of human "stray animals" mentioned above.)

The condition of these serfs was hereditary; their children were born to servitude; they could not hold property and had no legal standing. Yet they, doubtless, in their turn looked down upon the large class of household slaves in the cities and castles as their social inferiors.

Above these serfs, sometimes also described as held *in tuitæ personæ*, there was the large class of those held *respectu tenimentu*—a class between bond and free, and known by a bewildering multiplicity of names in Latin, Greek, and Arabic, according to local custom, or the preference or training of the scribe—or for other reasons which have escaped the most patient analysis. (We must never forget, however, that the Middle Ages were not as complicated in daily life as they seem to be in books.) The condition of these classes varied also according to local custom, that great factor in the shaping of the conditions of life of the mediæval peasant, or according to the stipulations they had been able to make when their town or district surrendered to the Normans, or when they were called in from elsewhere as settlers to colonise a tract of land.

The tenants of Monreale seem to have been bound to the soil. In a deed of 1177 three Mohammedans acknowledge themselves to be "serfs" of the Abbot Theobald and undertake to pay an annual tribute in money and corn in return for the permission to live elsewhere. (Or does this apply to three runaway serfs of the glebe, who had "bettered themselves" elsewhere, and thus show the thin edge of the wedge, the commutation into money, that was to break up the whole system?)

In the summary published by Professor Garufi of the deeds found in the invaluable Cartulary of Santa Maria of Monreale there is, again, a kind of *platea* or roll of 1183, containing the enumeration of the "*coloni od avventizii, i borgesi ed inquilini*" (but be it noted "*esclusi sempre i servi iscritti nelle platee*"), who are recalled to Monreale, in virtue of a decree of the Royal Treasury; *i.e.* recalled to obligations of some kind which they had tried to evade, possibly only taxes and military service, possibly the tenants' tribute in money, kind and labour. In any case they were thus virtually bound to the soil.

The men of Patti *of Latin tongue* were, on the other hand, practically free tenant-farmers, paying rent (in the mediæval combination of week-work, *corvées* and dues in money and kind), but free to give up the holding whenever they chose to do so, and go elsewhere. Yet this holding was hereditary and could be sold, but only to another tenant of the estate.

Men of this category could also, according to the Suabian Code (*ca.* thirteenth century), acquire, hold, or inherit property, could be ordained priests without their lord's permission, by simply giving up their tenure, but could not become notaries or judges, who must not be "of vile condition." Another clause of the Suabian Code gives rather an amusing instance of the fact that the "rustics" counted socially, though at the very bottom of the social scale. It relates to noises and disturbances at public assemblies and fixes the rate of fines thus: if the offender is a "rustic," he pays one augustal; if a burgher, two; if a knight, four; if a baron (who presumably ought to know better), eight; while if a count forgets himself thus far he pays sixteen. The obligations of these *rustici* would vary, and I shall not attempt to define them. A most interesting little document lately published by Professor Garufi gives a definite notion of the tenor of the relations between landlord and tenant in one concrete instance. It is the *pactum* made in Messina in 1196 by Amatus, Abbot of S. Maria di Valle Giosafat with some men "who from Calabria came to Sicily" for the construction of a *casale* (village). (The mediæval peasantry in Sicily, as a rule, lived agglomerated in villages, hamlets and towns.) The substance of the agreement was in brief this: they were granted land for the building of houses for themselves: eight *psalmatas* of arable land each, on which they had to pay dues to "our church," a certain portion of the olive-grove near

Mesepe, from which also the due was stipulated for, and of the vineyard (our first glimpse of a mediæval vineyard on the slopes of the Etna), from which half the product in fruit or wine was claimed. They were held to one day's labour a week throughout the year and a good many other days, duly specified, during harvest and sowing time, &c., and were to give *salutes* at Christmas and Easter, "as is customary." (These *salutes* still survive in some parts of Sicily in the form of "presents" of a fowl or capon at Christmas and Easter.) "When in our service" they were given a certain measure of bread; from the beginning of May to the end of August more bread; during sowing time also, wine and "cooked food" (*coquinatam*: soup) with the bread.

There is no mention here of the vexed question of pasturage and firewood; nor of all the other dues in money that tended to make the lot of the villains hard. The latter would never be mentioned in a contract of this kind, being indeed rather of the nature of taxes, not rent—but the result to the peasant was the same.

* * *

This upper class of villains in their turn were merged in the class above them of small *burgenses* or *burgisi*. Two interesting and well-known documents, which are of great importance also for the history of communal development, the Statutes of Catania of 1168 and the Constitutions of Cefalù of 1157, recording the privileges conceded by the archbishop or bishop to the burghers of their respective cities, would, in some respects, seem to be addressed to a rural population of small tenant-farmers. The men of Catania are even guaranteed the right to make their *ploughs* in the woods. We can almost see them looking out for the stout forked branch, or, if possible, dried root, that would serve their purpose—which, however, must not be taken from a fruit-bearing tree, so that the splendid oaks, beeches and chestnuts were left untouched, in the superb woods above the town, or the beautiful billowy foothills of Etna now (in 1909) covered with villas, gardens, vineyards and *case coloniche* (peasants' houses).

The fertile plain of Catania and the whole region round Etna now surprise and delight the traveller coming from the generally desolate interior, with its endless tracts of pasturage between the few high-perched towns, by the number of these peasants' houses and the evidence everywhere of careful "small farming." Was it so in 1168? Did the peasant population of this region live scattered or agglomerated? The statutes referred to would seem to show that they lived in the latter way.

Even the episcopal city was then still largely a semi-rural community, like most of the towns in Sicily to-day except the big sea-port towns, such as Palermo, Catania, &c. Even in Syracuse the day-labourers on the villas, or tenants of the farms round, mostly live in Syracuse, and often have a two hours' walk to their work.

It is still so in Cefalù, to which town our second document refers. Like the Statutes of Catania the *Constitutiones Bosonis* or Constitutions of Boson, Bishop of Cefalù, contain clauses settling questions of importance to a population with rural interests ; such as the right to cut wood and shoot game in the episcopal forest, to slaughter beasts and grind their own corn. In the words of Professor Garufi, we find "one class only ; the *burgenses*, who, in addition to their agricultural and pastoral pursuits, drove trades, in a small way, as butchers, bakers, and charcoal-vendors."

These glimpses of everyday life in one of the smaller towns are of double interest to us, since they relate to Cefalù, the old cathedral town on the north coast, unique in archæological interest, as lovely, suggestive, and exotic in site as in name, with the bold mass of the Rocca contrasting grandly with the shimmering undulating plain, and the grand classical sweep of the coast-line.

It is possible that these homely trades were plied

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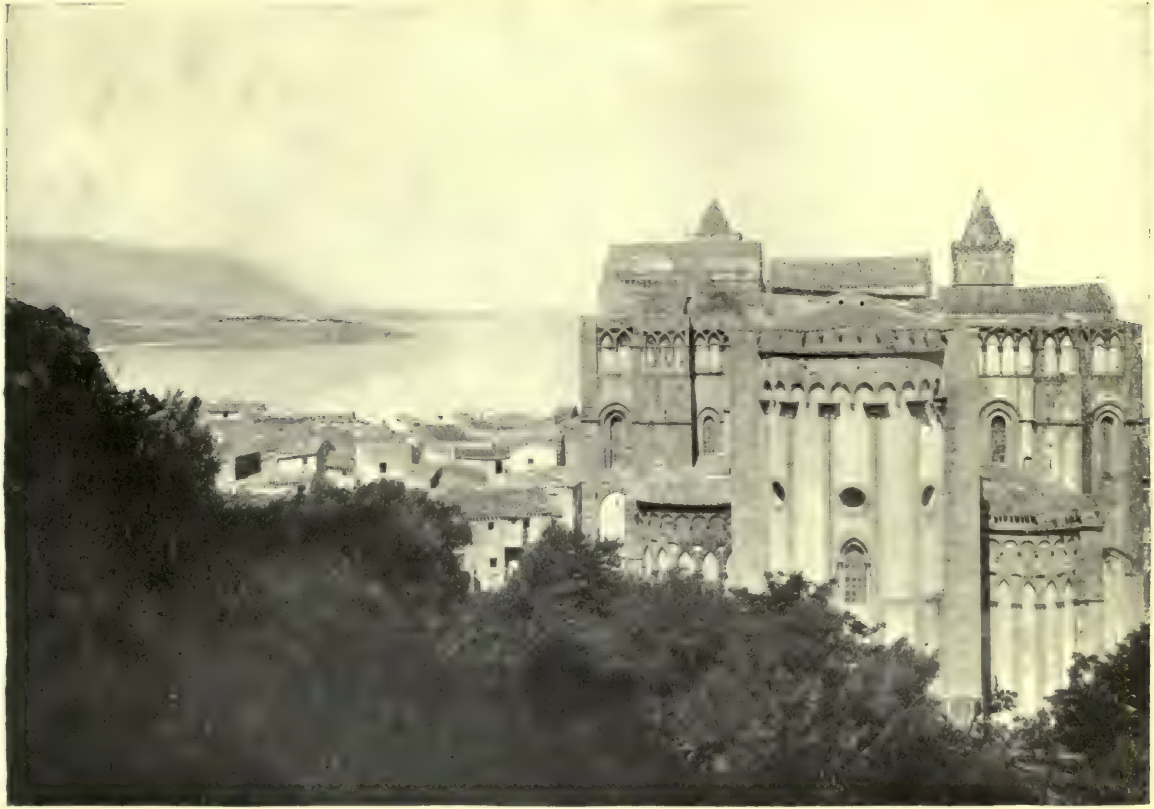

Crupi, Taormina

CEFALÙ

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in the same kind of tiny, open shops, with the family mattresses piled up on the trestle-bed and the votive lamp kept burning in the dusk of the background, and the family cooking going on over a small portable stove outside, that are still to be seen in certain dark, narrow side-streets running down steeply landwards, and still enlivened at eventide by the home-coming of the men ; the mules toiling patiently uphill with their huge burdens of faggots, and the peasant owner astride on top.

Among the customers of these peasant-burghers there would be the fisher-folk and seamen that lived in the irregular alleys near the sea, poverty-stricken, but full of brightness and colour. Their customers probably, but never their friends ; mediæval people were apt to limit their sympathies to people in their own walk of life and more especially to dwellers in their own streets or quarters. Clustering round the mosque left them somewhere there would be also, at this time, a Muslims' quarter with a bath or two ; fondaks for merchant travellers, having storerooms for merchandise and stabling for sumpter-mules all round the large courtyard, and lodgings for the merchants above ; markets, bazaars, and flourishing handicrafts—witness the spirited little Saracenic pictures among ornament painted (somewhat later) in black and white and colour on the dark beams of the timber roof in the nave of the cathedral. At the date when the Constitutions of Boson were granted (1157) only the east arm and transept were (presumably) completed—but probably consecrated, as the glorious mosaics in the apse are dated 1148—walled in provisionally to the west and open to public worship. So these rustic townsfolk would be admitted to the nave to puzzle and wonder over the radiant vision on the golden background of tier upon tier, as in Heaven itself, of sweet-faced bearded saints and dazzling young angels in jewelled robes, the Holy Mother herself in the attitude of prayer, and, rising above all, the solemn image of Christ, full of compassion and majesty. . . .

Grouped round the cathedral nestling under the superb Rocca with its castle, and scattered along the main thoroughfare (known as the Via Marmorea, *i.e.* paved with marble) on sites still occupied by later mediæval palaces, we must picture to ourselves a certain number of fine Saracenesque houses or palaces, the dwellings of Bishop Boson and the clergy, of a few wealthy traders (we know from ibn Jubair that Cefalù was "a flourishing sea-port town enjoying great economic prosperity") and lesser nobles; and, surging round these, a broken wave of the flotsam and jetsam of mediæval civic architecture, picturesque if not tidy; sheds, stables, stone huts, probably also as in Palermo, *chirbe* (tiny orchards with a small house), and stray palm-trees. And mingling with these, finally, squatting in all waste places, or thickly clustered outside the city walls, the miserable hovels of the numberless serfs of the cathedral, whose very names we can see written down, a certain number in Greek, but most of them in Arabic, in the famous platea of 1145 exhibited in the archives of Palermo.

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We know less about the villages (*casali*) so often mentioned in the records (*cf.* p. 91), and it would be rash to attempt even the conjectural reconstruction essayed for Cefalù. To judge by the present-day *casali* they were probably a mere agglomeration of cottages round a church, with an occasional fig-tree, but without either gardens or *basses-cours*. Onions were grown in the vineyards or olive groves, the woods and pastures supplied in abundance wild leeks, fennel, asparagus, cardoons, chicory and numberless other varieties of edible roots and luscious herbs; the domestic animals generally lived with the family and the *basse-cour* was the road—also the kitchen, living-room and nursery.

The old type of Sicilian cottage has so much affinity with certain primitive prototypes of later development that it deserves at least to be mentioned here. About a third of the one room at the back is divided off into two stories ; two alcoves or sleeping-rooms—the conjugal bed always in full sight—below, a kind of loft above, where the hay, corn and wine are kept, with various odds and ends, and where the boys are sent to sleep when too big to share their sisters' room. The windows, if any, are in the wall fronting the street, the door wide and always kept wide open all day ; a lower (inner) half-door is sometimes shut for privacy. To the right and left of the door are the manger, with a space below where the fowls are kept at night, and the baking-oven or cooking-range (fitted up with *fornelli* for charcoal), with a space below where the pig sleeps. On winter nights the family gathers round a portable hearth or brazier of fireproof clay, encased in wood. These houses are thus literally *atrii* in the primitive Italian sense of " blackened " by smoke. The most important piece of furniture was until recently the loom where the women sang over their web from morning to night. . . . In many places the poor people still live in caves, as they did in Byzantine times and probably all through the intervening ages, making use of the tempting accommodation offered by the formation of the limestone cliffs, with their natural caves and terraces or platforms, for life out of doors during the day-time. When the cave is sweet and dry, they are not worse off than in an ordinary cottage or *basso*, which generally has a floor of natural stone or mud, and seldom, if ever, a window at the back or sides.

* * *

Sordid squalor, miserable hovels, a life more fitted for "stray animals" than human beings, were, however, only too often the lot of the mediæval peasant, whether bond or free. Yet we must not think of their lives as of lives of unalloyed misery. Sicily is still profoundly "Mediæval," and the conditions there to-day (or rather yesterday) can help us to realise the conditions of the early Middle Ages.

Read Villari's eloquent "Lettere Meridionali," or the accounts by Sidney Sonnino or other warm-hearted, clear-sighted social students, written in the seventies, when the state of the southern provinces first began to attract attention, and they will show you an almost inconceivable state of economic misery and tyrannous exaction : an illiterate peasantry, ground down by taxation, oppressed by a phalanx of middlemen, subjected to an intricate and injurious system of "profit-sharing," which leaves all the losses to be borne by the labourer ;

virtually bound to the soil by fetters of debt; driven to petty thieving, or worse, in self-defence, and altogether seeming more like dumb, driven cattle than human beings; crushed down beyond the possibility of reaction or joy.

Read the accounts of the folk-lorists, mostly collected at about the same time, and by keen, trained, careful observers, and you will think yourself transported into the midst of a patriarchal idyll of the classical Golden Age. Work is in some districts begun and ended by the solemn invocation "*Sia lodatu e ringraziatu lu santissimu e divinissimu Sagramentu!*" pronounced by the *Capo* or Head, to which the others respond in chorus, drawn up in a row: "*Sempri sia lodatu*"; it is resumed after meals with the same formality, to which is added, by way of grace, the chanted cry, repeated three times, of "*Viva Maria*," uttered by all the men in unison with bared heads and right arm and hand raised, palm upwards, in the old Pagan attitude of prayer. The important spring months of growth and fructification are in the same way rendered solemn by old ritual observances, survivals of the immemorial past, too complicated to be mentioned in passing here; while May Day is celebrated with rites which seem the very essence of poetry—of mediæval poetry. At daybreak on May Day all the peasant women betake themselves to the fields, to gather the *Ciuri di Maggio* (May flowers; the marigold), with the rhythmical invocation, chanted with the flowers held towards the nearest church, chapel or cross, or towards the rising sun:

"Divina Pruvidenza, pruvviditimi;
divina Pruvidenza, cunsulàtimi;
divina Pruvidenza è granni assai;
cu' teni fidi a Diu, 'un pirisci mai!"

Then the maidens join hands and dance round on the grass (a regular mediæval *carole*), singing as they dance these verses that seem to have retained something of the joyous full-blooded lilt of some of the ancient spring songs that have been handed down to us:

"Maju torna, maju veni
cu li belli soi ciureri;*
oh chi pompa chi ci fa;
maju torna, maju è ccà!

"Maju torna, maju vinni,
duna isca a li disinni;†
vinni riccu e ricchi fa,
maju viva! maju è ccà!"‡

Rhymed wishes or invocations are also sung with the flowers held towards the nearest cross, the maidens praying to God for "a happy lot," *i.e.* a husband, the married woman wishing for health, wealth and prosperity in the home, very often adding :

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* Ciureri, fiori, flowers.

† Gives food for hope.

‡ Ccà = quâ, here.

> "Ciuri di maju cògghiu,
> cimici a la me' casa nu' nni vògghiu ;
>
> "I gather flowers of May,
> Bed-bugs in my house—away ! "

Then they all go home to pile the marigolds on the church altar, and to deck themselves and their cottages with the flowers ; provident housewives not omitting to put a big bunch under the bed as a charm against the dreaded enemy.

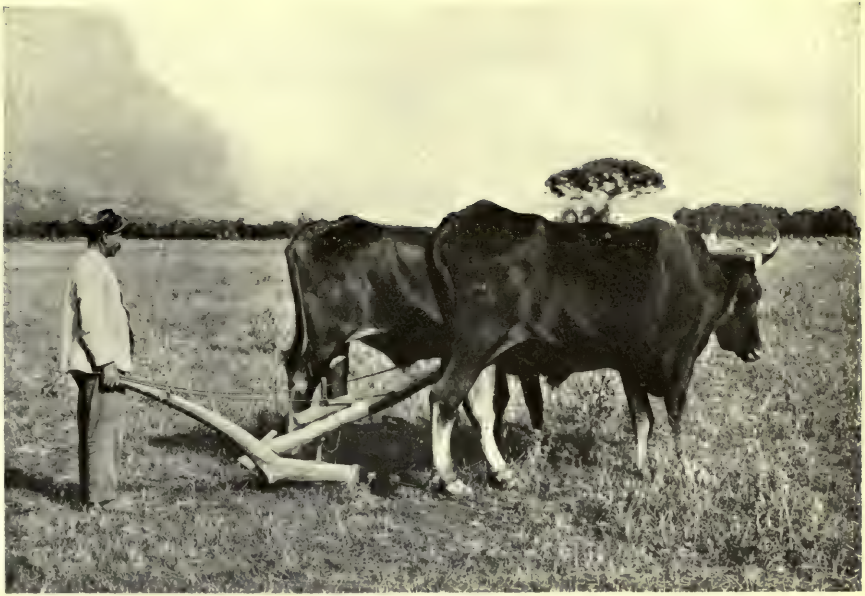
At harvest-time the fields resound with song, either religious chants or songs suited to the occasion, expressing hopes for a plentiful harvest, or for virgin wine (not watered) and plenty of *maccaruna* and *ricotta* (curd cheese) in the big bowl at dinner ; never licentious, and all ending with a religious refrain :

> " Sia lodatu lu Santu Sagramentu !
> E viva di lu Càrminu Maria ! "

Yet wine circulates freely at the master's expense, meals are frequent and abundant. After the supper of *maccaruna* there is half an hour of vigorous all-over dancing with or without women—to prevent the muscles from stiffening.

From the first to the thirteenth of June the women repeat little rhymed orations at home

VIII



WOODEN PLOUGH, 1910

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before the flower-decked image of St. Antony of Padua, the tutelary saint of the growing corn. In some localities the festival of the Madonna delle Grazie (June 2) is celebrated with offerings of first fruits and even certain rites directly recalling the pagan observances in honour of Great Old Mother Demeter, or Ceres herself. To this we may add that the plough in general use in 1910 is still the primitive one—the plough alike of Triptolemos and of the men of Catania in 1168, mentioned above.

At threshing-time there are more songs, principally addressed to the mules as they plod round in a circle, yet ending in the usual religious refrains. It is said that the mules understand them and all break away after the end of the last verse. The sacks of corn are carried to the town by strings of gaily caparisoned mules, with a muleteer riding in front, singing the beautiful traditional love-songs, full of quaint imagery and deep poetic feeling set to beautiful old airs, to the accompaniment of the numberless little copper bells. If there are two strings of mules the muleteers sing alternately.

The vintage is a bacchanal—especially on the slopes of Etna . . . thus in the very region where we can catch a glimpse in the records (*see* above) of vineyards existing in the twelfth century—full of rollicking licence, laughter, song and fun. The songs are here all joyous, some joyfully praising the freedom from care and from debts, some frankly pagan, amorous, even licentious —all with some reference worked in to grapes or to the season. The place of the religious refrain is here taken by choral cries of

"llarà, llarà, llarà,"

or by refrains like this:

"Amuri mi la fà:
la fà, la fà, la fà,
dintru stu pettu stà."

("Love does it, does it, does it, love fills this breast of mine.")

Another set of appropriate songs occurs in connection with the harvest of olives and pressing of the oil at the beginning of winter, while the old Saturnalia survive, as we know in the masqued revels and riotous form of the Carnival, finding a repercussion of more or less grotesque mummery and coarse jollity in the remotest country village; jollity, sometimes, that is very coarse indeed;— peasant life, with all its complexity, is not anywhere a rose-water idyl.

The Carnival is also, as in the towns, the season set apart for indefatigable dancing. Dancing also occurs of course at weddings, during harvest and vintage time, and at some of the various fairs and festivals. There is even an amusing instance on record of the whole population of Taormina, old and young, set dancing the tarantella at a kind of garden party or *festa* given by an English lady in the grounds of her villa, when the band happened to strike up the familiar irresistible strains. As a rule, however, it is mainly during Carnival time that the old, old, irrepressible dramatic and primitive instinct finds a vent. All good-sized rooms are emptied of their furniture, and dancing goes on everywhere, a few old country dances, originally danced and sung, mingling with more modern ones, and the characteristic, the incomparable tarantella. The dance now generally called so has a good deal in common with the Neapolitan dance of that name, but is purely Sicilian in character ; a graft on the old "Fasola." It is danced in couples—men and women, or only men, as it happens—the partners fronting one another. Sometimes several couples join in a set, when the various figures, representing the phases of mimic love-making, become very intricate indeed. The music, generally played on a flute with a tambourine accompaniment, follows or directs all these phases in various rhythms ; the time is intensely *tempo rubato ;* there are certain new bursts or waves of impulse, after a comparative lull, that run through the veins like fire, even of non-dancers. The dance differs essentially from the Neapolitan tarantella in the characteristic restraint in the dance of the women, in the contrast between the passionate throbbing and swirling of their feet to the music, and the continuous, broad, rhythmical sway of their hips and trunk. The head is always held level, the arms are not moved, the right hand is placed on the right hip, the left arm hanging. Yet every woman dances her own dance, expresses, perhaps unconsciously, her own temperament. In a very animated tarantella I witnessed once near Syracuse, there were two excellent women dancers. One was a young mother (indeed a nursing mother between the dances), rather tall, a *blonde cendrée* with a skin of dull gold; all her movements, accordingly, were full of a kind of languorous abandon even during the quick movements, very beautiful in line. The other was a handsome black-eyed, low-browed girl, short and very swarthy, and as supple and agile as a little black panther. Her first movements were rather brusque; but as the spirit of the dance seized her and she trod the mazes of the figure, she flung her head back and danced away, followed by her partner, like a little untamed thing of the wood, determined not to be caught. When thoroughly on fire, she used to stop and bound up and down like a ball to the pulse of the music; yet her right arm never left her side. The men move their arms freely, and can throw themselves into any attitude that pleases them, as long as the figures are followed and the rhythm observed. Their dance, too, is dramatic and personal, either faun-like, supple and full of the quivering harmony of muscles in action that we are accustomed to think of as classical, or full of sturdy, fiery energy, or even deliberately grotesque, when the dancer is conscious that he had better adopt that line.

The real Fasola was originally danced and sung; a fragment of the old dramatic dialogue between a man and a woman has been taken down and published by the late Salamone-Marino. In this the man begins with expostulation, the woman answers with violent reproaches (for supposed fickleness), whereupon the man, losing his temper, cries out:

"Cidda, la lingua accurxati!
Ti zitti, o si, o no?"

("Will you hold your tongue or will you not?")

Of course the woman replies that she will not.

"E no, e no, e no,
Sempre ti dicu no!"

Then he strikes the note of tender regrets for the past, but thinks he had better leave her. She comes to her senses—he can't think of leaving her like that—but oh, if he knew how unhappy she was, &c.

HE. "Then you still love me, if not, I will go."
SHE. "No, no, sweetheart, stay. I love you. Don't go!"
HE and SHE. "E no, e sì, e no!
Sempre stu cori è tò!"

There would be much more of interest to mention over which I must not linger; the deep fund of poetry, tender, passionate, tragic and scornful, revealed in their love-songs, contrasting quaintly with the set formalism of the preliminaries to marriage; wedding ceremonies full of old classical symbolism, the mystic and spectacular element liberally provided by the church, incorporating and sanctifying old pagan rites and observances, and accompanied by unrestrained celebrations such as once had delighted their faraway ancestors; the rough-and-ready dramatic representations, real old miracle plays, to which I shall return later, in out-of-the-way localities, composed, staged and performed by the peasants themselves. A complete study of the inner and outer life of an illiterate and imaginative peasant population would also have to take into account several other and far deeper aspects, such as the hysterical excesses of religious fanaticism, the deep gloom of bigotry, and other phases of peasant life which it is impossible to dwell upon here, in a short volume dealing professedly only with some of the outward and visible aspects of Mediæval Sicily.

Some of these picturesque customs and traditions, here described mainly after the accounts of highly competent observers, taken down about twenty or thirty years ago, when the tradition was still unbroken, still linger in some conservative districts ; a good many of them must have existed, in similar if not identical forms, during the Middle Ages, for the simple reason that they bear the unmistakable impress of ages older far than the Middle Ages—sometimes of " dateless antiquity."

If it would be absurd to take for granted that the hard-worked and exploited modern peasant, or the down-trodden mediæval serf, consciously appreciate, or appreciated, the picturesqueness of all this as we do, especially now that it is suffused with the sunset glow of the end—the end of the longest day that human history has yet known ; yet would it not be equally absurd to think of their lives as of lives of unrelieved misery and unalloyed gloom, when they had the alloy of solemn observances, as important to them as to children, and impressive pageants, inside and outside of the church —and the relief, the real physical relief, of dancing and song ?

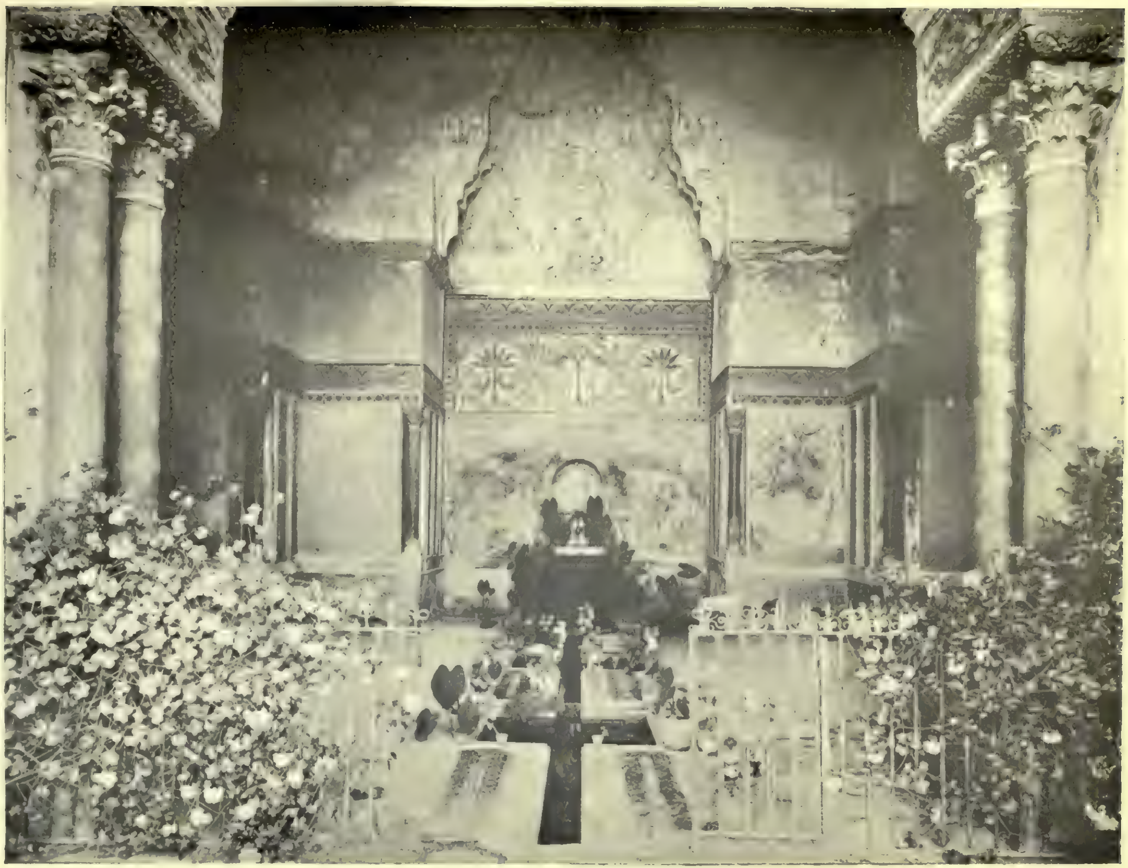
Perhaps it is these that explain their incredible long-suffering patience . . . !

CHAPTER VI

ARABO-NORMAN PALACES : THE SUMPTUOUS ARTS

There is no doubt about the luxurious Eastern type presented by the pleasure palaces of the Norman kings. It is so unmistakable and suggestive that it used to be taken for granted, during the earlier romantic period of Sicilian archæology, that they dated from the time of the Emirs, these tall mysterious buildings, crowned aloft with enigmatic inscriptions in recondite Arabic lettering and containing halls—now opening directly on to public if deserted squares in quiet garden quarters—like those of the Zisa outside Palermo, with its stalactite ceiling, its walls panelled with precious marbles and gorgeous golden mosaics, the little tinkling rill of water, kept cool in the Oriental way by running down over a carved slab, flanked by inlaid steps which once glittered in gold and ruby beside the moving veil of water.

This opinion was at one time held by Girault de Prangey, the finest and most gifted art critic that has studied these palaces, and was by him put



HALL OF THE ZISA

p. 110

forward in his fine standard work—"Essai sur l'architecture des Arabes et des Mores en Espagne, en Sicile et en Barbarie," published in 1841.

But it is a far cry in archæology from 1841 to 1910. For the Cuba all doubts were solved as soon as Amari, then a political exile in Paris, had read the inscription (at first from paper squeezings obtained by two enthusiastic young archæologists, Patricolo and Salinas, at the peril of their lives), which refers to William II., and gives the date of 1180. For the Zisa likewise, with the progress of photography . . . and the fall of the Bourbons. These palaces are not Arab; they are Arabo-Norman, like some features of the Norman administration, like the life at court and in these halls, like the poems sung in praise of them. . . . As for the Favarah, or "Castello di Mare Dolce," it is possible that it is built on the site of a pre-existing villa of the Emirs, as suggested by Amari, who sees a reference to the Emir Gafar in the name of Kasr Gafar given by ibn Jubair to a castle about a "parasang" from Palermo, which might be the Favarah. Only the most distinctive feature, the lake, would seem to be a creation of King Roger's.

Says Romualdo Salernitano the chronicler: "And that the delights of land and water might never be lacking to such a man, he had much earth dug out in a place called Favarah, and made a fair fish-pond, in which he commanded that fish should be put of every kind and from every region. He also had built, close to this fish-pond, a very fine and noble palace . . ." ; and further on : "In this way, this wise and prudent man enjoyed the delights aforesaid, according to the temper of the seasons. In winter and during the Lenten season he stayed in the palace of Favarah because of the great quantity of fish there ; in summer he sought to temper the fire of the heat in the *Park*, and there to seek a certain solace in the moderate exercise of the chase, for a mind oppressed with many cares and troubles. . . ."

Nor is there anything about the architecture of the Favarah to make it seem probable that certain portions of the palace are earlier than others—*cf.* the careful diagram drawings and inscriptions published by Dr. Goldschmidt based on very careful examination *in situ*, an undertaking of no small difficulty as the buildings are now inhabited by the very poorest class of labourers, and in an indescribable state of squalor, alteration and decay.

It is still a building that lends itself to a lot of conjecture—in its suggestive state of abandonment and its unlikeness to the type shown by the Cuba and the Zisa : externally tall cubes these ; internally strongly centralised round a hall with *līwans*. . . .

The Favarah, instead, consists of low buildings round a courtyard, surrounded by arcades; with the further originality in plan (*see* Diagram, p. 124) that these arcades do not follow the line of the building on all four sides of the enclosed space, but start off at right angles from a certain point of the south-west wall, forming a quadrangle. The rooms opening on to this courtyard are all smaller and lower, some even arranged in two stories, than those in the north-west wing, which contains the chapel and two large and lofty halls with broad, pointed brick doorways fronting the approach from Palermo; all suggesting a division between the official and the residential parts of the palace—or between men's and women's quarters, kept jealously separate.

The remains of walls, marked 38 on the plan, show traces of red (*i.e.* watertight) cement, and are thus probably a well or fountain. The kitchens and offices must have been somewhere near it. There are no signs anywhere of fireplace or chimney—but this only because all the delicious fish caught in the lake and all the other food was cooked over the little portable charcoal stoves still in use. It was probably eaten, by the king at least, in the handsome hall marked 14 on the plan—with its fine coupled window set high in the wall to the south-west, and its superb water-gate and landing-stage to the south-west fronting the lake and the lovely island with the two far-famed palms.

The entrance hall (3) has some many-ribbed decorative vaulting (now inaccessible) over the niche communicating with the chapel. Except this, not one scrap of interior decoration has been found, not even the columns of the coupled windows. The chapel has the typical east end with a dome and three apses of the smaller Rogerian churches; in this case, all constructed in the thickness of the wall. The tall drum supporting the dome is here round; a heavy outside cornice of stone brackets—evidently later—gives a queer castellated look to this little tower. The exterior is superbly simple. More importance is given to the noble rooms and the chapel by the Arabo-Byzantine device of decorative arched recesses or sunk panellings round the windows, and by ample doorways; an exquisite harmony between wall-spaces and openings—simple and few, these, and expressing the arrangement of the interior in a quiet suggestive way; the whole pile crowned by a broad band of fine lettering (now gone) and built on a kind of peninsula, so that it was surrounded by the waters of the lake on three sides. There must have been a singular charm about these simple reposeful water fronts, painted pink or white probably, rising sheer above the deep red foundations from the sparkling waters of the lake. Round the landing-stages clustered the barges gaily "adorned in gold, silver and colours," in which, says Benjamin of Tudela (about 1184), King William II. "went pleasuring with his women." "Oh, how fair is the lake," sings Abdur Rahman, from Trapani, "and the palace in its midst. . . . The clear water of the two well-springs is like liquid pearls, and the basin like a lake. The branches of the trees seem to stretch out to look at the fish in the water and smile at them. The big fish swim in these limpid waves, and the birds in the garden sing melodiously. . . . The ripe oranges on the island seem fire burning on branches of emerald. . . . The yellow lemon seems a lover passing his night in tears for the absence of the fair one. . . . The two palms are like two lovers seeking refuge from their enemies in this safe shelter, and standing up straight to disarm suspicion and confute evil tongues. . . ."

This lake was more than half a kilometre long, stretching its shimmering expanse to the foot of the beautiful clear-cut Monte Grifone. The "liquid pearls" from the two famous well-springs (the Arabs were great at celebrating the beauties of water) gushed plentifully out of the flanks of the mountain itself through three monumental combined archways, still standing, though the waters have found another channel to the big irrigation tank that is all that now remains of the original Mare Dolce. The old margin is still traceable by the vestiges of red cement found in the lemon-groves ; pieces of boats or barges have also been found.

There were also ruins of fine baths somewhere near the palace landwards, pulled down in 1880.

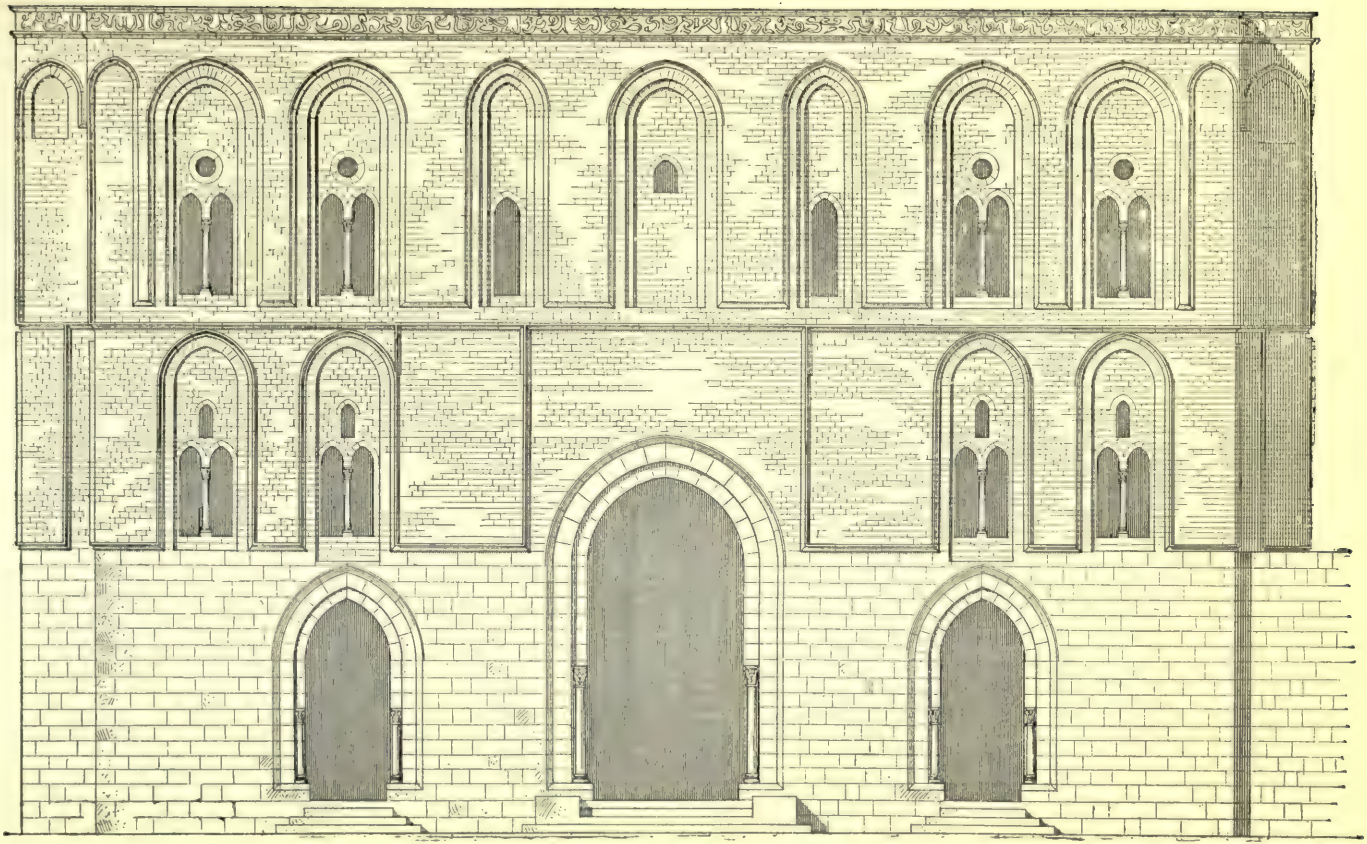
Such was King Roger's winter abode. The summer this "wise and prudent man" spent in "the Park" thus described by Romualdo:

"He enclosed in walls certain mountains and forests round Palermo and made a delicious and lovely park there, planted with various trees, and in this he had put deer, goats and wild boars. He also built in this park a palace, to which he had water brought by subterranean channels from the clearest of well-springs."

This palace may be represented either by the extensive shapeless remains of old buildings mingling with the cottages of the present village of Parco, or by the far more interesting building at Menani or Mimnerno, near Altarello di Baida, so evidently a little hunting-lodge meant for retreat in hot weather. These charming ruins, picturesquely planted on different levels on a hill-side facing east, now consist of three connected parts: a chapel to the left, Rogerian (?) but not domed, over a basement room that may have been a bath; a later wing (thirteenth century) to the right, and a central hall. This is built over the source of the Ain-al-Menani well-spring, which once gushed out over ornamental rockery, ran in a little channel across the floor and through the main arch, and spread out into a formal lakelet in front of the building. The arrangement is thus like that of the better-known Zisa. Stalactite and *plissé* vaults over the niches—sockets for shafts at the angles—show that it was once also appropriately decorated in the same general style. Unfortunately, no dating detail has been found, so we do not know if we may be allowed to entertain the interesting assumption that this was a "real" Saracen villa, made use of by King Roger. Dr. Goldschmidt is inclined to favour this view on the ground that the places where it conjoins with the chapel building show cracks in the masonry as if this wing were a later addition.

The well-known Zisa, begun by William I. (1166), completed by William II., offers a very different aspect from the hillside pavilion of Mimnerno or the low-spreading pile of the Favarah. A huge cube of masonry, crowned by battlements, at first sight it seems to have more in common with a Northern civilised keep of the type of Langeais than with an Oriental pleasure palace. Yet there is nothing Northern about the

Zisa. The battlements are a later "embellishment" carved out of the original inscription parapet surrounding the flat roof. The elegant Arabo-Byzantine treatment of the exterior, full of fine rhythmical modulation, corresponded effectively to the very Oriental interior. The great feature here was the hall running through two stories and having three large niches or *līwans* with magnificent true honeycomb vaulting. The upper stories are now lived in and thus inaccessible, and, it is said, unrecognisable, but there is a most vivid description in a delectable sixteenth-century book of travel by one Fra Leandro Alberti, giving no names but describing the decayed marvels of a wonderful "Moorish" palace near Palermo (one of three once built by "a Moorish king for his three daughters"), then in the hands of peasants and "inhabited by beasts. . . ." On these upper floors he mentions "little cloisters open to the air above at the top of the winding stairs" (i.e. *loggie*), with vaulting *alla Moresca* (in the Moorish way) ; windows with little columns wrought *alla Moresca ;* beautiful columns of the finest marble ; in the centre of the building above the central hall, a cloister or court, also open, with three little sanctuaries (niches) vaulted *alla Moresca*, in which he thought that these Pagans kept their idols ; a flat roof covered with (red) bitumen.



MAIN FRONT OF THE ZISA

Restoration by A. Goldschmidt. From "Die Königspaläste Palermos."

Zeitschrift für Bauwesen

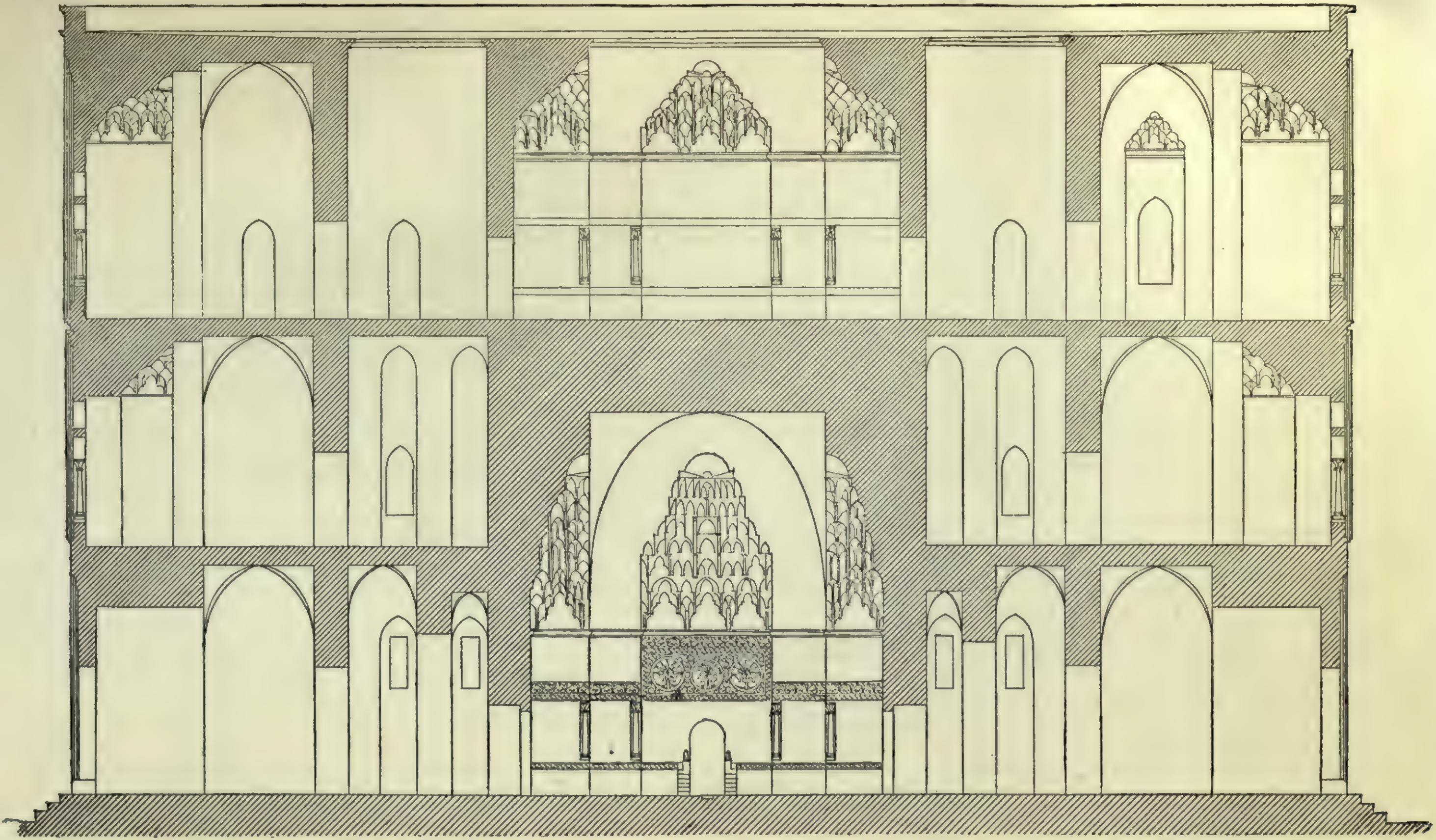
p. 118

The present piazza in front of the great central archway opening out from the vestibule and main hall was then a *peschiera* or lake. In this lake there was a little pavilion on an island with a bridge at the further end, "well builded and measured rooms"—with more "superb and excellent" honeycomb vaulting and more pretty coupled windows "from which one could see the live fish swim in the lake." Flights of steps led down to the lake, which was surrounded by "un vago giardino di cedri, limoni, e naranzi."

There is still a good deal remaining of the interior decoration of the cool and sumptuous central hall, which in some moods appeals to all as surely the finest of the kind in existence. The style of this decoration shows the famous blend of Byzantine and Saracenic elements about which we shall have so much to say later.

Byzantine are the two superb pairs of coupled columns flanking the archway between vestibule and hall, the marble panelling of the walls with the bands of parcel mosaic, the little inset shafts of granite with delightful Byzantine capitals of formal birds pecking at tiny grapes; Byzantine are the mosaics still remaining, as Byzantine doubtless were the mosaics of the vaulted ceiling described as "golden" by Fra Leandro. In style these mosaics differ from those of the contemporary churches in the sparing use made of light tones; except for a white rim round the leaves of the palmetto border, all is sweet deep-toned harmony of two reds and a full green, with some dull blue and neutral buff. These mosaics were restored in 1511–12 by that turbulent and much persecuted person Maestro Pietro of Monreale—who has done his work with the loving care generally put by imaginative artists into delicate work. The subjects chosen for the panel over the fountain, representing archers, peacocks and conventionalised sub-tropical trees in circular medallions, are an interesting example of the range of subjects used for secular decoration, obviously due to Oriental inspiration, transmitted to Byzantium, partly by means of textiles, carved works, &c., partly by workmen flocking to the capital from the Asiatic provinces, and thence spreading in waves and ripples over Western Europe.

Saracenic in spirit, style and execution is the ornamental plaster-work border in the vestibule, with the famous poetic inscription, once running all round the archway between vestibule and hall, now mutilated. The portions read by Amari show that it belongs to the order of genuine poetic inscriptions, celebrating in sonorous verses the magnificence of the king and of the well-chosen site. It ends: "This is Paradise on earth. Here



SECTION OF THE ZISA

Restoration by A. Goldschmidt. From "Die Königspaläste Palermos."

Zeitschrift für Bauwesen

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dwells the Mosta-izz" (he who desires glory: the Arabic designation chosen by William II.) "and this is the 'Aziz" (the noble or splendid palace).

The little chapel belonging to the Zisa, now used as the sacristy of the neighbouring church, has the typical Palermitan east end with a dome over the space in front of the altar, and the dome set on honeycomb squinches built out from the walls to meet and support it.

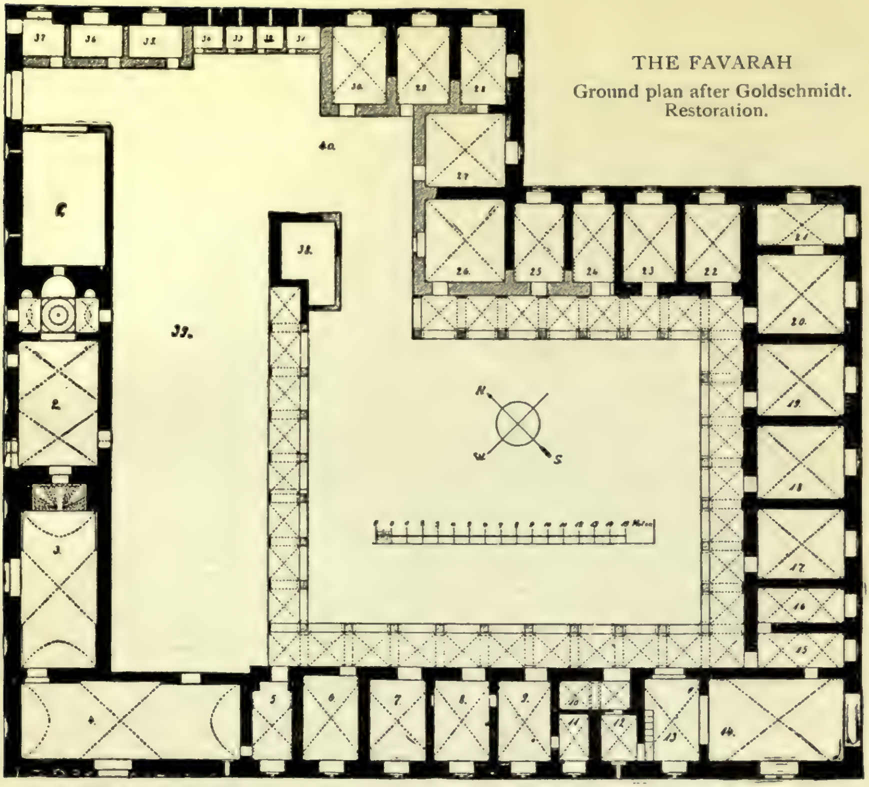
The latest in date (1180) of these Arabo-Norman palaces is the huge pile of masonry enlivened by vestiges of decorated wall arcades, now know as the Cuba, rising above the walls round the barracks to the left of the tram-line to Monreale. It is now used for barracks, and as large portions of the outer walls have been rebuilt and the arrangement of the interior obscured by later staircases and party-walls, it is mainly of interest to architects and archæologists. It offers, however, a charming contribution to the history of Arabo-Norman decoration in a precious fragment, over one of the recesses, of stalactites combined with panels of pressed plaster-work, very spirited, fine and free in treatment and the only instance of this work that has survived except the frieze of the Zisa. (There is a good cast of it in the Sala Araba at the Museum.) Below this there are traces of a wide double window, and below this again of a water-gate. The Cuba, like the Favarah, was on three sides surrounded by water. The ground plan suggests magnificence. There was a spacious entrance hall or vestibule, with wide pointed arches, opening into lower side rooms, the three rooms occupying the whole width of the building. Another wide arch gave access to the central hall, communicating with the lake by means of two water-gates in arched recesses ; it is in one of these that the precious fragment of decorative plaster-work has been found. This central hall may possibly have had a dome. Beyond this hall again there was another large room with three recesses, two in the thickness of the walls, here thicker than elsewhere, evidently *líwans ;* and one in the axis of the building, with another water-gate, looking out on the main body of the lake. Vestibule, central hall or court, and main room all run through the entire height of the tall building. There were no upper floors except, probably, over the side rooms of the vestibule. Dr. Goldschmidt therefore suggests that the Cuba was used for official receptions and the like. The use of the pointed arch throughout, when the arch was used for recesses, windows and archways leading from one room to another ; the traces left of exquisite decoration ; the effective alternation of suggestive water-gates—one at the end of the noble vista through these lofty halls with reposeful recesses lit from above—all lead us to suppose that the magniloquent terms of the inscription round the top of the building, bidding the wayfarer "pause and admire the illustrious (unparalleled) dwelling of the most illustrious king of the Earth, William the Second," &c., are not a mere poetic exaggeration.

According to some writers both the Cuba and the Zisa were enclosed within the walls of "the Park." The little domed building of the Cubola still reminds one of the number of kiosks, pavilions and fountains that once studded the pleasure grounds of these palaces. Quietly situated at the end of two long straight walks in a fruit grove, no place is now better suited for the delights of reconstructive dreaming, as the gentle breeze fills the sonorous dome with vague music.

⁂

Except that jewel of jewels the Cappella Palatina, there is very little left standing of the Royal Palace of the Norman kings that aroused the admiration of contemporaries, and this little is almost hopelessly entangled in later additions and alterations, in handsome late Renaissance, ugly Bourbon and, worst of all, meretricious sham Mediæval

The beautiful situation—on an irregular rocky eminence at the top of the Cassaro or inner city—was the same (though not spreading so far out to the west, as the original castle was here built along the line of the city walls, *cf.* plan, commanding the same unparalleled view across the shimmering plain and lovely foot-hills—then enlivened with capricious constructions and hunting-lodges of the type of Mimnerno, now with balustraded villas and pink peasants' houses—to the mountains of Monreale and San Martino. But of the old girdle of towers round castle and bailey—those to the south rising up sheer from the banks of the river Kemonia and overlooking a region of monasteries and gardens—the only one still *in situ* is the superb old corner tower to the north-east, the Torre Pisano (at present known as the Torre di S. Ninfa), now comically disguised by the night-cap dome of the Royal Observatory, with some of its old wall arcading round the ugly modern windows. Timidly squeezed in between this and the present main front there is part of what was probably the old Joharia—or "golden palace," now dressed up in shabby sham-Gothic furbelows, like a decayed gentlewoman. There are also certain parts of the foundations of the Torre Greca, the west tower of the chapel, &c. (marked in black on the accompanying plan, given after Goldschmidt), but that is all.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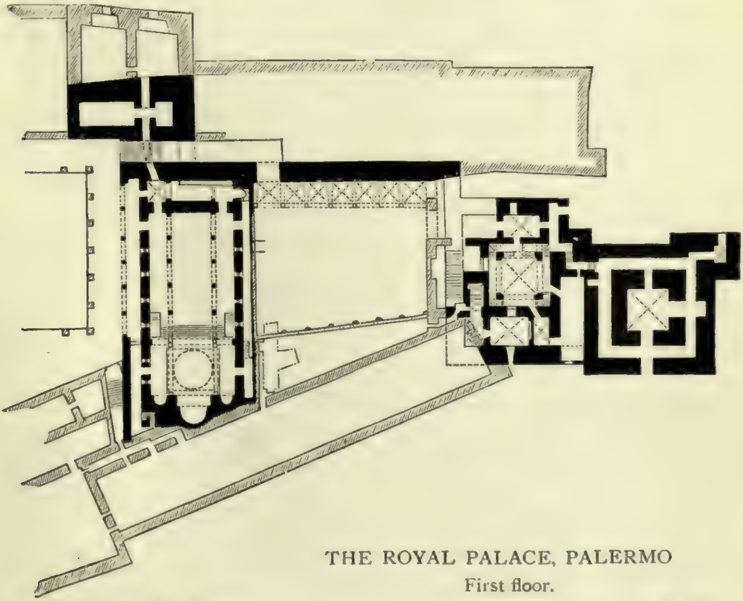
THE FAVARAH

Ground plan after Goldschmidt.
Restoration.

Zeitschrift für Bauwesen



THE ROYAL PALACE, PALERMO

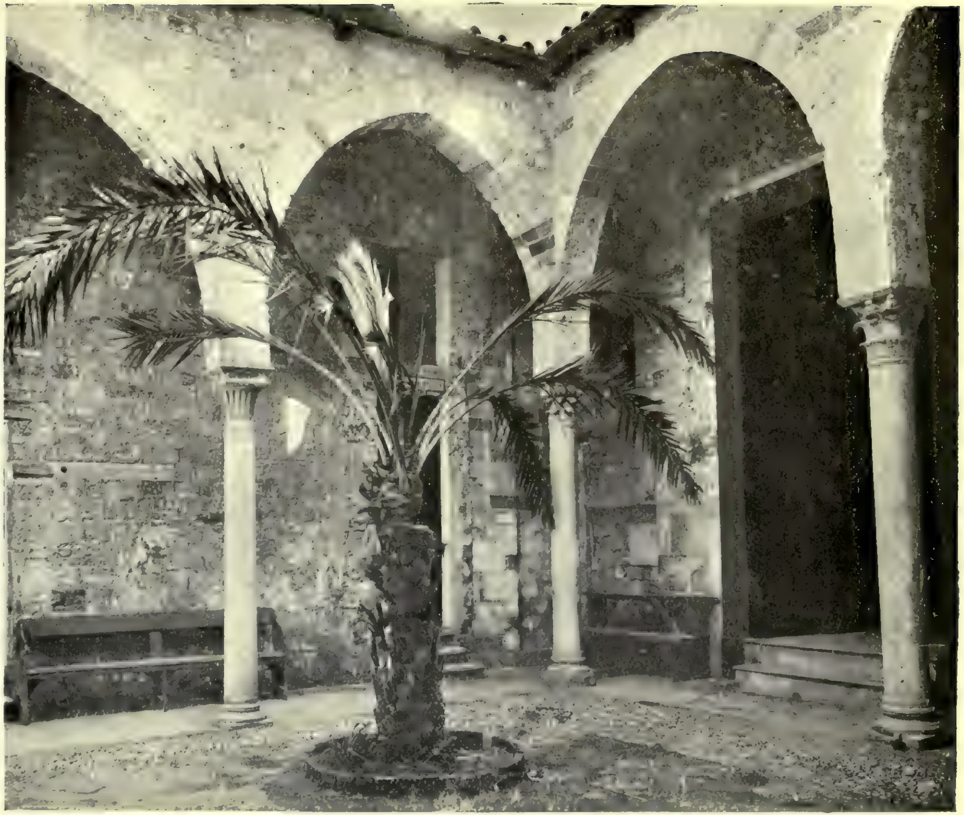
First floor.

Zeitschrift für Bauwesen

Several interesting passages in the descriptions of contemporaries, such as those given in the preceding chapter, must therefore remain unexplained. We must rest content with knowing in a general way that there was an outer courtyard or bailey with several sturdy towers and the usual conglomeration of offices, workshops—one of these the *tirâz* or silk weavery—servants', soldiers' and courtiers' quarters found in all outer baileys of mediæval castles. To the right, raised up high with a flight of marble steps leading to it, there was the Royal Chapel with an outer portico (on three sides?) and a detached bell-tower; beyond this, round an inner courtyard, the residential part, built on different levels and described by a contemporary Arabic poet as having "*loggie*, turrets, clothed (by the vegetation) with beautiful brocades covering the perfumed soil as with carpets of Sind," when "the zephyrs brought the fragrance of Arabia—the trees were laden with fruit and the birds vied one with another in song, as is their wont, from sunrise to sunset"; with "a capricious fountain" somewhere where lions (or according to the poet, "wild beasts") poured out "the waters of Paradise"; also a palace proper called the Joharia (=golden, shining) by Hugh Falcandus.

One of the palace rooms shown still glitters with gold and gleams with precious marbles, and though much restored, gives a fair idea of the sumptuous splendour of even the smaller rooms of the period. It is the "Roger Room" overlooking Palermo, on the second floor next to the Torre di S. Ninfa. The proportions are fine, and must have seemed finer originally when there were two window recesses; one of these is now blocked up by the Renaissance front. In place of this window there is now a modern fireplace for which two of the "wild beasts" of the old fountain have been pressed into service. The walls are sheeted with marble and enriched by costly columns, mostly new, and inlaid borders of parcel mosaic. Mosaics on a gold ground spread over the entire upper part of the room. They have been very much restored; those in the ceiling in the thirteenth century, as shown by the introduction of the Suabian eagle; those over the north door quite recently.

The representations of archers, wild beasts, such as real lions and spotted leopards, tame birds and luxuriant Asiatic trees belong to the same range of subjects as those in the Zisa, and seem to show in the naïve arrangement in superposed zones, differing from the Byzantesque medallions of the Zisa, what might possibly even be an old Assyrian tradition lingering, maybe, in Persia. The study of Sicilian art is full of these dazzling glimpses of historic continuity, owing to so much having been



CORTILE OF THE CASA MARTURANU

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preserved there—such as these princely halls—that is lost elsewhere.

The room with pretty pointed arches opening out of this, now fitted up as an exceedingly ugly dining-room or smoking-room with a skylight worthy of an English suburban villa, was in Norman times a little court open to the sky.

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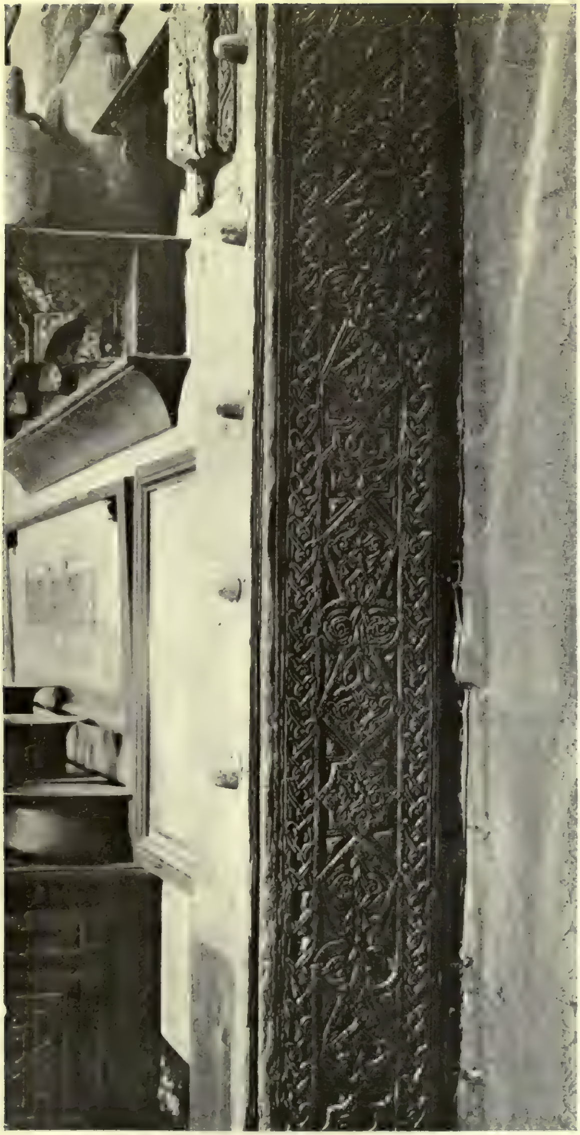
The sumptuous mode of interior decoration employed for these palaces is further shown by some fragments, now in the Museum, of bands of white marble used for framing doorways, with bold Cufic inscriptions inlaid in porphyry and serpentine, by the fine carved wooden doors at the Martorana and by the still finer door, or rather framework of a door, now in the Museum, found in the house of Goffredo Marturanu, adjoining the Church of Santa Maria dell' Ammiraglio. Two sides of the cortile of this charming house are still visible, bearing witness to the taste and elegant luxury displayed in the private houses of the day—copies of the palaces on a smaller scale with a vaulted central hall opening on to a fountain court. The door is palatial in dimensions, at least five metres high, both jambs and frame richly carved. Of the doors only one panel has been preserved, apparently one of eight, showing three carved panels framed in plain boards.

Dr. Moritz, who has seen the photograph, is of opinion that the style of the work, as of that of the inscription on the column to the left in the cortile, appears from the photographs to be of the first part of the eleventh century. It does not follow that the whole tiny palace is pre-Norman. Such "fitments" as doors and columns would be readily taken from older buildings in those days. In any case the Saracenic style in Sicily would be likely, after A.D. 1060–70, to be "backward."

All the lovely minor objects of art—or of daily use—scattered about these halls or brought out on State occasions to strike awe into the beholder, are now, however, lost or dispersed. In Palermo itself there only remain one or two ivory caskets—and the priceless and beautiful crown of the Empress Constance, King Roger's daughter.

The ivory caskets may now be studied in the treasury of the Cappella Palatina. It will not surprise any one who has examined it at all attentively, or tried in vain to account for the occurrence of this rounded and opulent shape in the twelfth century, to hear that the handsomest of these alleged Arabo-Norman caskets is, by M. Gaston Migeon, considered to be made in Sicily "à une époque relativement basse et selon les procédés



CARVED FRAME OF DOOR
FROM THE CASA MARTURANU

Now in the Sala Araba in the Museum, Palermo. To the left, attached to the wall, a panel (originally one of eight) of the same door, having three carved panels set in plain boards. Above, Saracenesque brackets from Trapani, *see* chap. xi.

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italiens du XV^{e} siècle, avec des formules décoratives arabes." It is not the less interesting on that account from our point of view.

It is nice to be allowed to believe, on the other hand, on the authority of the same competent judge, that the far more interesting painted ivory casket of the Cappella Palatina may represent a local Sicilian tradition of style. Says M. Migeon : "Il est enfin une série d'ivoires *peints*, généralement des boîtes de forme cylindrique, décorés au pourtour du couvercle d'une inscription coufique, et sur la surface de la boîte, de scènes à plusieurs personnages, de cavaliers et d'animaux. Parfois la forme de ces boîtes est celle d'une châsse avec couvercle taluté. La couleur est toujours apposée à froid, en rouge, en bleu et en or. On a pu les croire originaires d'Espagne, le pays sans contredit le plus fécond en travaux d'ivoire ; j'inclinerai à les croire plutôt *siculo-arabes*, en donnant à ce terme un sens extensif qui n'en exclurait pas l'Italie méridionale, en m'appuyant sur un objet du Kensington Museum. C'est un grand coffret à couvercle taluté, décoré de sujets *chrétiens*, de personnages nimbés, et d'inscriptions arabes, qui provient bien sûrement de la cathédrale de Bari. Le même Musée possède encore un autre grand coffret (700/1884) magnifique, avec des paons, des oiseaux, des entrelacs en or. Le petit Musée de la chapelle Palatine à

Palerme possède un autre de ces grands coffrets rectangulaires."

An ivory plaque now at Ravenna is also considered by M. Migeon as possibly Sicilian.

"Je croirais volontiers arabe, à certains motifs, tels que la disposition décorative en étoiles pour enfermer le sujet, ou encore les roues ou écussons aux articulations des épaules des bêtes (comme sur les étoffes ou le griffon de bronze de Pise), une *plaque d'ivoire* du Musée de Ravenna. Mais il est vraisemblable que l'art qui l'a produite, était loin d'être pur de toutes influences byzantines et chrétiennes. Le personnage en cotte de mailles, étendu au centre de la composition, qu'une hyène commence à dévorer, n'a rien de musulman ; c'est un chevalier chrétien, peut-être normand. Que cet ivoire ait vu le jour en Sicile, vers le XII^e^ siècle, cela n'aurait rien de surprenant."

It is from stray indications such as these that we must try to gain some notion of what these lost arts and crafts of Arabo-Norman Palermo may possibly have been. We are better off with regard to the products of the famous looms of Palermo. A good many of these have after all found their way to the safe harbours of cathedral treasuries and museums.

The *tirâz* has been mentioned and described above. It could not have been the only workshop of the kind in Palermo, and nowise been capable of supplying all the gorgeous stuffs used by King Roger at his coronation. These might all have been imported, it is true, as some of them doubtless were, but this need not be taken for granted. Was not Arabic Sicily renowned in the East itself for the beauty of its woven stuffs? The weavers brought back by Admiral Giorgios doubtless did much, by the introduction of new methods, to contribute to the renewed excellence of the Palermitan looms, but these looms themselves were part of the priceless inheritance from the Arabs.

In design these Arabo-Norman stuffs are as frankly Eastern as the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina. It is not easy now, even for experts, to tell a Sicilian fabric from an Eastern one. The inscriptions woven in may be a help, but where they fail or, like the Cappella Palatina inscription, transcribe decorative commonplaces such as "Glory, victory and long life," the patterns offer no infallible clue in the twelfth century.*

Saracenic weaving had by that time thrown off the bondage of formal Byzantinism, with its tight chain-armour of medallions and lozenges circumscribing the design. The conquering race, the Arabs, originally nomads, not being a people of artists, but of warriors, dreamers, mathematicians, poets, found it convenient to let the conquered races work for them when the desire for art and luxury arose with increasing settled prosperity. Their first purveyors were the Copts of Egypt; their earliest art is decidedly Coptic, *i.e.* Byzantine, in character. By degrees these Coptic craftsmen would, by some mysterious process, hit upon the forms that pleased their Arab masters, by appealing to the hidden imaginative sources of what we call taste, and the characteristic forms of Saracenic ornament would begin to show themselves.

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* An interesting instance of questionable attribution is kindly communicated by Mr. A. F. Kendrick, of the Victoria and Albert Museum. There is at Regensburg, in the Treasury of the Cathedral, a royal vestment (a dalmatic) of gold brocade, generally accepted as Sicilian on the strength of an inscription which, until recently, has been read as saying that the dalmatic was made by Master Abd-el-Aziz in his factory

The next big wave of influence came more directly from Asia, represented either by immigrant craftsmen or by enterprising merchants carrying costly woven stuffs to promising markets. By Persians, that remarkable people, Mohammedans, yet setting at naught the alleged prohibition of the Koran forbidding the representation of living beings; so artistically gifted that they turned all they touched into beauty, transforming the stiff Byzantine con-

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for William II. Mr. Kendrick now writes me that "the inscription has been read by a competent Arabic scholar (Mr. Guest, of the Education Department), who assures me that he cannot read the inscription as referring to William II. Abd-el-Aziz is all right, but the translation of the rest is uncertain."

ventionalisations into their incomparable tulips and carnations (in much the same way as the highly gifted French artists of the early Gothic period transformed the stiff Romanesque acanthus into the delightful and sprightly forms of their own woods and meadows) ; and withal heirs in a direct unbroken line, through the Sassanians and ancient Persians, of the art traditions of the ancient Assyrians, renowned for their love of Asiatic big game, and sumptuous rugs and hangings.

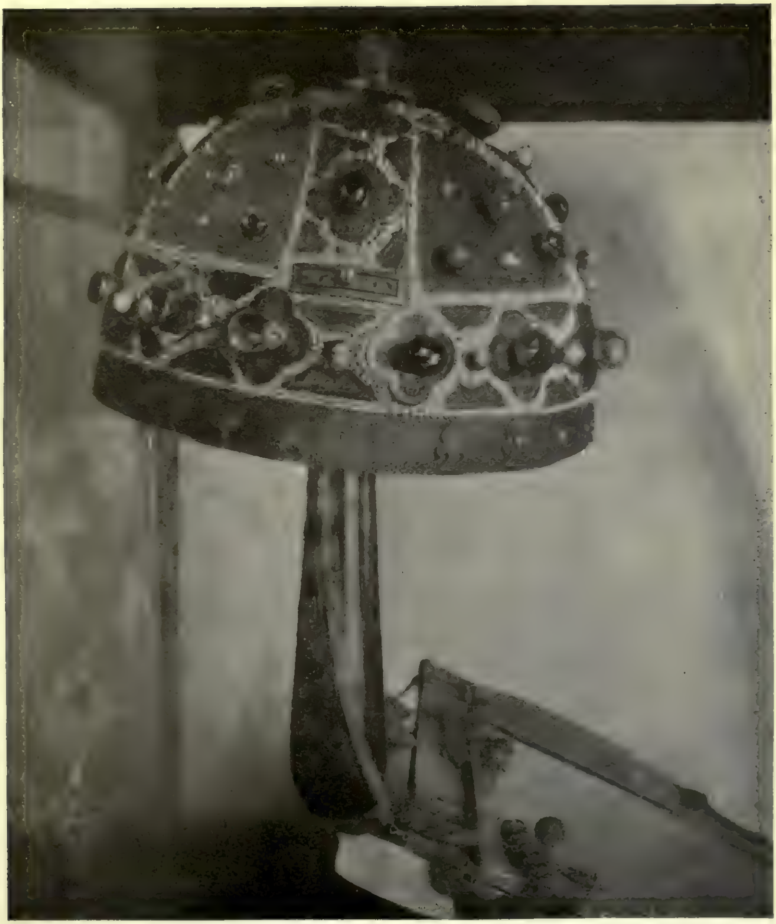
Or by travelling merchants from Bagdad from the old, old centres, where a good deal of the old skill in weaving must have lingered, bringing these magnificent and far-famed Mesopotamian fabrics interwoven with gold, which naturally exercised a direct influence on the woven stuffs of all Muslims round the Mediterranean, in both technique and design. Some of these designs show evident influence of the artist-weaver's delight in the pattern of some piece of silk brought from China.

This Chinese feeling has crept into some of the Sicilian brocades. In others the birds or beasts—sometimes strangely *adossés*, sometimes chasing one another, generally if not always arranged in stripes or bands—show more of the Middle Eastern character which meets us elsewhere in Sicilian art, while the foliage and floral scrolls evince vivacious Saracenic feeling. Medallions, lozenges and other formal devices of pattern are still used, yet there is far more ease and freedom of arrangement than in earlier Byzantesque stuffs, with their solemn stiffness. Narrow stripes alternate with broader ones, the decorative possibilities of the handsome Arabic lettering are made the most of, colour is generally arranged in variegated bands, or flames, shooting through the gleam of gold. The gold thread used is, we are told, of the type known as Cyprian gold, consisting of narrow strips of gut or parchment gilt and wound about a silk cord to form a rounded thread.

In the thirteenth century even this slight formalism disappears. The design becomes freer and more playful; circular medallions are replaced by graceful wreaths, bands tend to become wavy and Arabic inscriptions frankly simulated. It was this class of patterns that was transmitted to Lucca with the due skill in reproducing them, when Sicilian prosperity declined by degrees after the death of Frederic II. From Lucca and other Tuscan centres it gradually spread northward. For the silks that charm our eye, as for several of the vegetables that now delight our palate, we owe a great debt to the Arabs of Sicily.

Undoubted products of the *tirâz*—which was also a school of embroidery—are the royal vestments carried away by the robber-emperor Henry VI., and now in the Schatzkammer at Vienna. Still used for the coronation vestments of the Austrian emperors, they give a stupendous idea of twelfth-century royal splendour on State occasions. There is an alb of whitish silk with gold embroidery round the neck and cuffs, and a deep border of purple silk, embroidered with gold thread and seed pearls. It has a double inscription in Latin and Arabic, saying, in brief, that it was worked for William II. in 1181. The royal sword was suspended to a rich girdle of gold brocade with an inscription in Latin. Even the hose were embroidered and given an inscription, the shoes more richly embroidered still. Over all this would be worn a superb mantle like the one still preserved in Vienna. This mantle is of red silk damask, embroidered in gold thread and enriched with plaques of enamel and a profusion of seed pearls which are used throughout for outlining the design. The inscription is here in Arabic, and records that the mantle was worked in the royal factory of Palermo in the year of the Hegira 528 (A.D. 1134).

The crown worn with these magnificent garments may be studied in the dedication mosaics of the Martorana and Monreale (Pl. III., IV.), and compared with the one priceless treasure left in Palermo, the crown of the Empress Constance, found intact when the Royal Tombs were opened in the eighteenth century, and now preserved in the Treasury of the Cathedral. This head-dress has a crown of reddish gold brocade between the broad bands of seed pearls and gold, is studded sumptuously with jewels in gold sockets, one of these bearing a longish Arabic inscription in minute Neshki characters, and has beautiful Byzantine pendants on either side, of gold and fine pearls. The rim is studded with exquisite little fleurs-de-lis or rather palmettoes, markedly Oriental in character, of finest filigree, with rich blue turquoises.



CROWN FOUND IN THE TOMB OF THE EMPRESS CONSTANCE, TREASURY, CATHEDRAL, PALERMO

Interguglielmi, Palermo

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CHAPTER VII

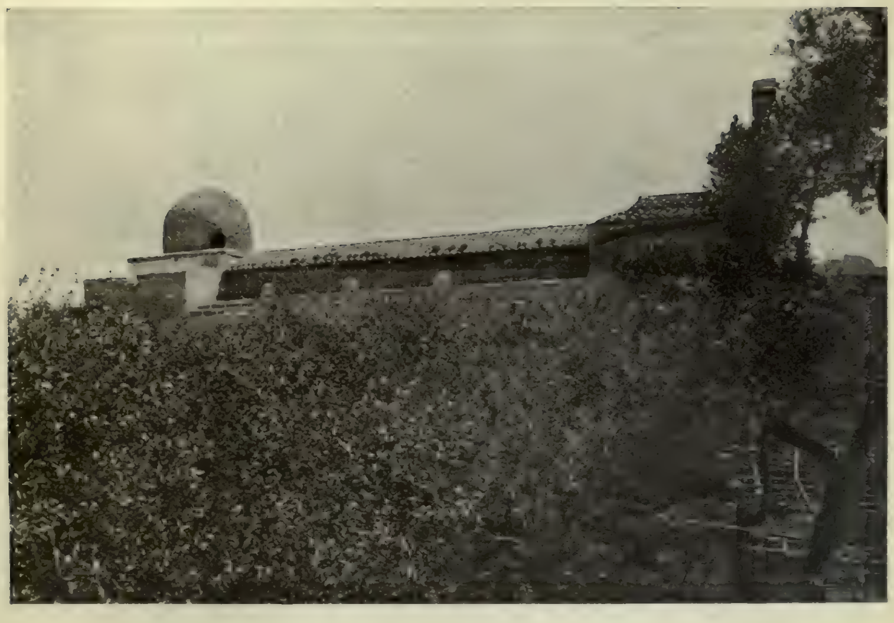
THE MARTORANA, THE CAPPELLA PALATINA AND SOME SMALLER CHURCHES IN PALERMO

TRADITION assigns the founding of several churches to the eleventh century, three by Robert Guiscard in Palermo, and one of these under extremely picturesque circumstances. According to the tradition it was when the brothers were besieging Palermo and Guiscard had taken up his quarters in an Arab castle (later converted by the Normans into a hospital for lepers) on the banks of the Oreto, in the region then known for beautiful gardens and sumptuous villas. Many questions would be solved if we could accept the date of this foundation as the date of the building of the little church of S. Giovanni dei Lepprosi, with its three-aisled basilican nave terminating in a Greek east end with three apses and a dome.

In that case the very first church founded by the Normans, and built while they were still besieging Palermo, would show the famous "blend" of the two types of ground-plan, *i.e.* concessions, wise or forced, by the Latin clergy to the ritual requirements of the Greek element in the count's army, or to the stubborn habits of the native workmen whom they must perforce employ.

Unless, indeed, the whole type was evolved elsewhere long before, and wafted to Sicily in some way not now easy to determine, in the remarkable Eastern countries that were the birthplace of Christianity. We must not let ourselves be tempted to discuss at length questions of "origins" in a short book of this general nature; but no writer dealing with mediæval art can afford to neglect to call the attention of his readers to the wide horizons opened by recent discoveries in the Orient (*cf.* W. R. Lethaby, "Mediæval Art.").

The little church, picturesque enough from the outside with its deep red dome rising above the dark green of the neighbouring lemon grove, now lies neglected at the end of a tanner's yard, and the dingy interior at first certainly seems rude enough to suggest vaguely a kind of unadorned early prototype of the Cappella Palatina. But one sees at once that it is a case of poverty and neglect, not ot primitive roughness; most of the dirty grey and dull dark blue plastering indeed covers a late Renaissance barrel vault and Renaissance piers. The plaster has lately been stripped off in places, disclosing a pretty capital of the class known as



S. GIOVANNI DEI LEPPROSI, PALERMO *p.* 138

Corinthian derivatives, rather early and quaint in type with its circle of beads. One isolated early capital, however, is no help towards dating a building from the early Middle Ages, when any capitals found were freely made use of (gilded). There is nothing in the architectural forms found thus far to differentiate the east end in style and type of construction from other small churches of the middle of the twelfth century.

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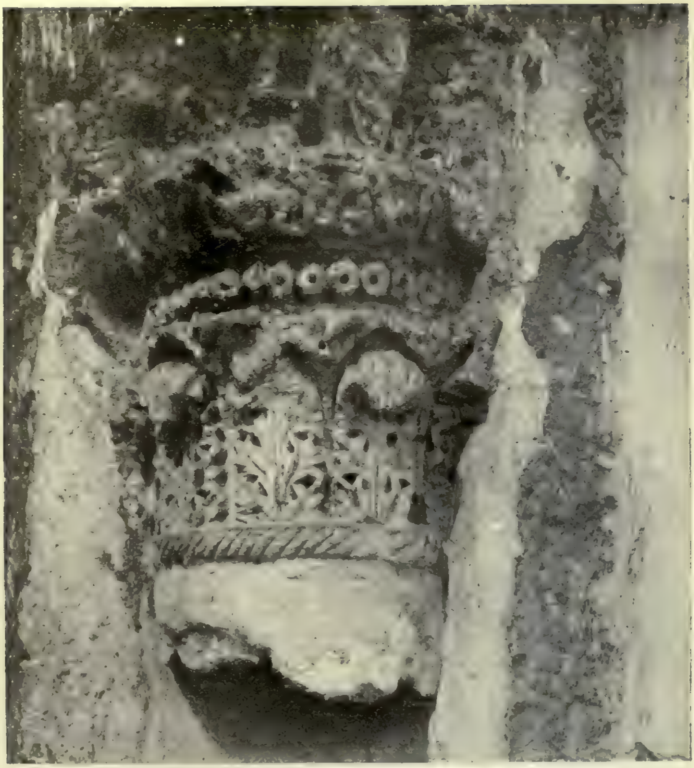
Count Roger was a zealous builder or churches and founder of new Latin bishoprics in the eighties and nineties of the eleventh century, as he proceeded to set his Sicilian house in order. He did not always consult the wishes of the Pope in this respect. The quarrel about the Investiture in Sicily, ending with the victory of the Norman upstart, is one of the famous ones. The first bishopric founded (in 1081) was that or Troina, the first stronghold of the Normans, where Roger and his young wife Judith had sustained the memorable siege in 1062, when they suffered hunger and thirst and only had one mantle between them to cover them at night. Somewhat later Messina became the favourite residence of the great count and the seat of the combined bishoprics of Troina-Messina. Nothing now remains of either of these two earliest cathedrals. According to Malaterra, the contemporary chronicler, Count Roger gathered masons from "all parts soever" (*cæmentarus condicens undecumque aggregat*), so as to hasten the work at Troina. This need not necessarily imply that he called in masons from Normandy. Even the still more famous passage describing the building of the castle of Messina, which runs *undecumque terrarum artificiosis cæmentarius conductis*, may surely be taken as referring to "all (neighbouring) lands soever" (on the mainland) according to the habits of those days, when building was going on, and does not necessarily prove, as used to be believed, that Count Roger had to have recourse to Norman masons for his first building undertakings of importance.

The cathedral of Troina is described as *Laquearia tectorum liguntur Ecclesia, Parietes depinguntur diverso bitumine*—which, without entering into particulars, may be taken to mean that it was painted, and had a wooden roof.

* * *

Some of Count Roger's deeds of foundation and endowment are of interest for the quaint personal note in the preambles, boasting of his mission as "defender and avenger of the faith," or referring to the "difficulties, dangers, hunger and thirst" and

XIV



CAPITAL FROM S. GIOVANNI DEI LEPPROSI

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loss of men endured; and boasting, with pious humility, that he (Roger), "thanks to the grace of the Holy Spirit, had liberated the Christians [in Sicily] from the tyranny exercised by the Saracens, and built up again, in honour of God, of our Lord Jesus Christ and of all the Saints, the churches destroyed by the wicked impiety of the Saracens." In another preamble a scribe with evident leanings to the illuminator's art describes the Holy Church as "Our Heavenly Mother who protects all men . . . the Queen who sits, honoured and cherished, in a dress of gold [*in vestitu de aurato*], at the right hand of God."

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Roger II. does not seem to have been very active as a builder until he came back as king and could give the time to it. The deeds record continual gifts and grants to churches and monasteries favoured before, especially a Greek one, San Filippo di Demenna—but only one instance of funds given for building (in 1115), to the Basilian monastery of San Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò. The abbey church at Agrò is, as we shall see, one of the most interesting churches in Sicily, but it was not built in 1115. From Palermo there is a tantalising mention of a church dedicated to Sta. Maria, founded by the

Admiral Christophorus, and consecrated in 1113 by an Archbishop Walter, assisted by other bishops. It must thus have had a certain importance and would, perhaps, if it had survived, have shown us Sicilian art in the making; the constructive methods employed before the various elements had interpenetrated, or the decorative motives at first used tentatively.

As it is, Sicilian art, the most fascinating hybrid that grows in the garden of art, bursts upon us full-blown, and it is futile to try to determine which is the graft and which the stem of the component parts. Two observations must find place here. It is not Norman and not eclectic. Eclecticism implies deliberate concoction and selection—and generally fails in its aim; it shows the unrest of decadence, not the ferment of vitality. The "Norman" factor in Sicilian art is almost negligible; the Norman kings were enlightened and gifted art patrons, certainly, calling in workmen from "abroad," as all kings, abbots and municipalities did in the twelfth century, when they could afford it; as quick to appreciate the artistic quality of the craftsmanship of their Saracen subjects as the literary charm of their poetry, or the practical value of their well-ordered administration. They were also enormously wealthy. But no other art than the *Sieges-allee* variety was ever produced at the mere bidding of princes. Without artists there would be no art.

The first church in order of foundation is Cefalù, that fascinating and unsolved puzzle. But so much of this is manifestly later that it seems best to deal with it further on and begin our account of the Rogerian churches with the exquisite Greek Oratory, decorated, if not built, by Greek workmen for the Greek Admiral Giorgios Antiochenos, now known as the Martorana, then called Sta. Maria de Admiratu, or, in Italian, later, as Sta. Maria dell' Ammiraglio.

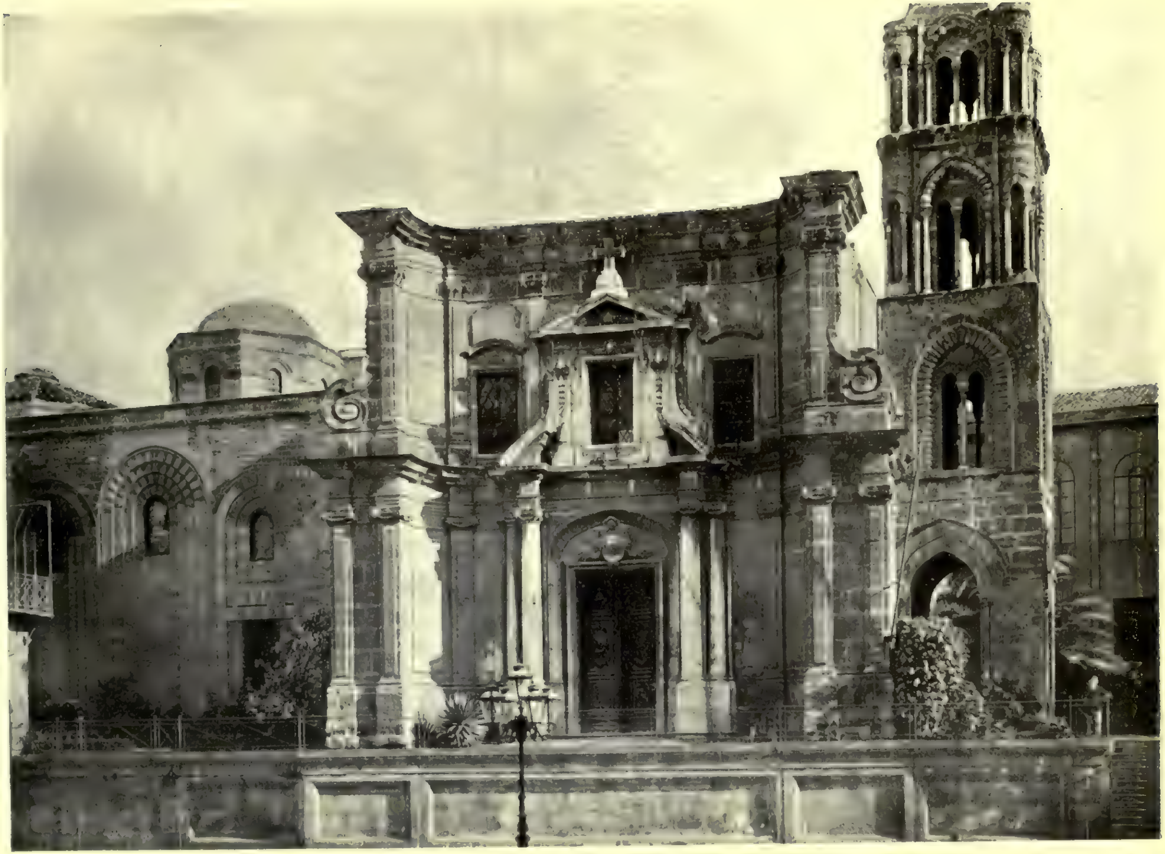
It is now a national monument and lies in a little quiet group, set in palms and raised up high on part of the old city walls, with the three-domed church of San Cataldo (once owned by, if not erected for, the great Chancellor Majone of Bari), and the lovely tiny " Saracenic " cortile of the Marturanu house (in what thus seems to have been a fashionable boulevard of the twelfth century, as we shall see later).

The Martorana has been rebuilt at least twice, and recently restored, and the first aspect is somewhat bewildering. As one passes in through the door from under the west tower, one finds oneself in a kind of low narthex or lobby, early Mediæval or Byzantine enough, as far as fine columns and capitals are concerned, but wider than the open church beyond. This has a nave and two side aisles with what seem to be three bays of varying width, supported by marble columns of singular beauty, no two alike (and one priceless), a dome over the farthest bay, a roof resplendent with the soft glitter of gold, and a floor inlaid with precious marbles. As you begin to look round, to study and disentangle, you soon find by the mosaics above, and the *opus Alexandrinum* below, that the plan of the oratory built for Admiral Giorgios was a true Greek square with a dome over the centre and three apses at the east end. The first bay of the church, the narthex (lobby), and the nuns' gallery above it, are all later additions, quaintly discordant, like seventeenth- or eighteenth-century interpolations in flowery language, in a fine mystic mediæval poem, but not so chilling as some didactic passages of the nineteenth-century restoration. Fortunately for once, this has been arrested in time by the judicial interference of enlightened savants; arrested, that is, after the learned and gifted restorer, the late Professor Patricolo, had been able to discover, for his benefit and ours, indubitable traces (foundations) of the twelfth-century porch and forecourt, yet before he could proceed with the "scientific restoration" which seems to have been contemplated.

To his researches is also due the only monograph that is at all conclusive of any of the great works of Norman Sicilian architecture. The Martorana, built for a convent of Greek (Basilian) nuns, was endowed in 1143 by Admiral George of Antioch. The deed of endowment, which mentions the church as already built, is honoured with the *alâma* (superscription in Arabic) adopted by King Roger, implying royal sanction. In 1146 there is mention of the sale to the clergy of the church, by the heirs of one Zoë, a wealthy lady, of an adjacent house, possibly on the ground now occupied by the atrium and tower, possibly more to the south, on which site certain houses are very carefully described in a deed of sale of 1266, as "alongside of the Marturanu house." That forecourt and campanile were completed in 1185, and Sta. Maria de Admiratu, then one of the fashionable churches of the metropolis, is proved by the account of ibn Jubair given above (pp. 69–70). In 1226 it was still in the hands of the Greek clergy. They seem to have been poor; in 1266, when they sold half of the house in the alley referred to above, this house is described as out of repair. In 1282 the famous Sicilian Parliament, after the Sicilian Vespers, when the crown was offered to Peter of Aragon, was held there; from 1295 to 1330 there are records that justice was administered and notaries were to be found at their desks in the atrium. From 1194, meanwhile, there had existed a convent of Benedictine nuns in the Maturanu houses on the other side of the alley. To these Sta. Maria dell' Ammiraglio was granted by King Alphonso in 1433, "their own church having become too small and their reputation compromised by the people gathered by night and day in the neighbouring church," which has thus since come to be known as the Martorana.

About one hundred and fifty years later it was again too small, and an "improvement and enlargement," greatly lauded by contemporaries, was contrived (as in town houses nowadays) by throwing down a wall and roofing over what had become a useless old courtyard, *i.e.* the atrium. They had the sense, nevertheless, to save and make use of the old columns and capitals, two mosaic panels from the old façade and the fine carved door of Saracenic work. More old columns were bought (in August 1688) from other churches, two from Sant' Antonio, three from Sta. Catterina all' Olivella. One of these shafts was of granite and was sawed in four to provide bases for the others.

In 1633–36 the need for a larger choir was felt, and was obtained—we can almost hear them discuss it—by pulling down the cramping semicircular wall of the old Greek apse, "which simply had to go." Some of the *tesseræ* of the mosaics were actually used in an attempt at imitation in one of the embrasures



STA. MARIA DELL' AMMIRAGLIO (THE MARTORANA), PALERMO

Alinari

of the new *cappellone*. In the eighteenth century there were further changes, principally redecoration with marble inlays in the gorgeous fashion of the day. Finally the top (cupola) of the bell-tower was taken down after an earthquake in 1726, when a skilful architect who saw it done "wept tears of rage at the folly of destroying the top instead of looking after the foundations." Other alterations and additions have been left unmentioned for brevity. The task taken over by the Government restorers in 1866 was not, it must be admitted, an easy one.

We shall begin our study with this campanile. It is evident, I think, that the tower still *in situ* is the "tower of many columns" described by ibn Jubair, and not dating from the thirteenth century, as has been suggested, on the score of a certain likeness to the west turrets of the cathedral. It is hardly conceivable that the tower of many columns seen by ibn Jubair should be replaced by another tower of many columns (the one we see) with another beautiful top (the one thrown down in 1726) in the thirteenth century, which was not a time of prosperity for the Church. Nor is there anything in the architectural forms employed to warrant this assumption. The upper stories are lighter and more ornate than the sturdy bottom story, but that surely is not an unusual feature of bell-towers. There is nothing about either the construction, the decoration, or the mouldings to date them later than the twelfth century. The plain clean mouldings are "early"; the vigorous corduroy work round the windows, the lava inlays in fine simple patterns, are well-known Saracenic motives characteristic of Arabo-Norman work (when they survived into the thirteenth century the corduroy becomes less assertive and the inlay patterns more flowery and varied). The tiny pointed arches used in windows and arcades, moreover, are slightly stilted and similar to those used in unchallenged Arabo-Norman work (in the coupled windows of the pleasure palaces—*see* p. 118), and the capitals, finally, of the Sicilian variety of Corinthian derivatives (*see* below), used elsewhere in the second half of the twelfth century for decorative shafts, for instance in the church of the Magione. The whole tower is as superb an instance in another architectural idiom as contemporary Vendôme, of the twelfth-century skill in steeple building, rising with the same beautiful logic from simple sturdiness to well-balanced play of sinew, disguised as airy decoration.

What was the lost top? Surely more of a light elegant lantern than a mere heavy capping dome like the one at S. Giovanni degli Eremiti? There would be plenty of precedent in the East . . . and does not ibn Jubair say (in Amari's version, at least) that the campanile of many columns was "surmounted by a cupola which rests on other columns"?

It is not now possible to say anything definite about the twelfth-century façade or forecourt, or to assign a place to the two lovely panels saved from the wreck. Some hypotheses present themselves but are best waved aside. Until an archæologist really familiar with Eastern architectural ideas, like W. R. Lethaby or Professor Strzygowski, suggests a plausible reconstruction, each student must study ibn Jubair and the ground plan; steep himself in the enjoyment of the panels and make his own imaginative reconstruction. They are always the most fascinating ones.

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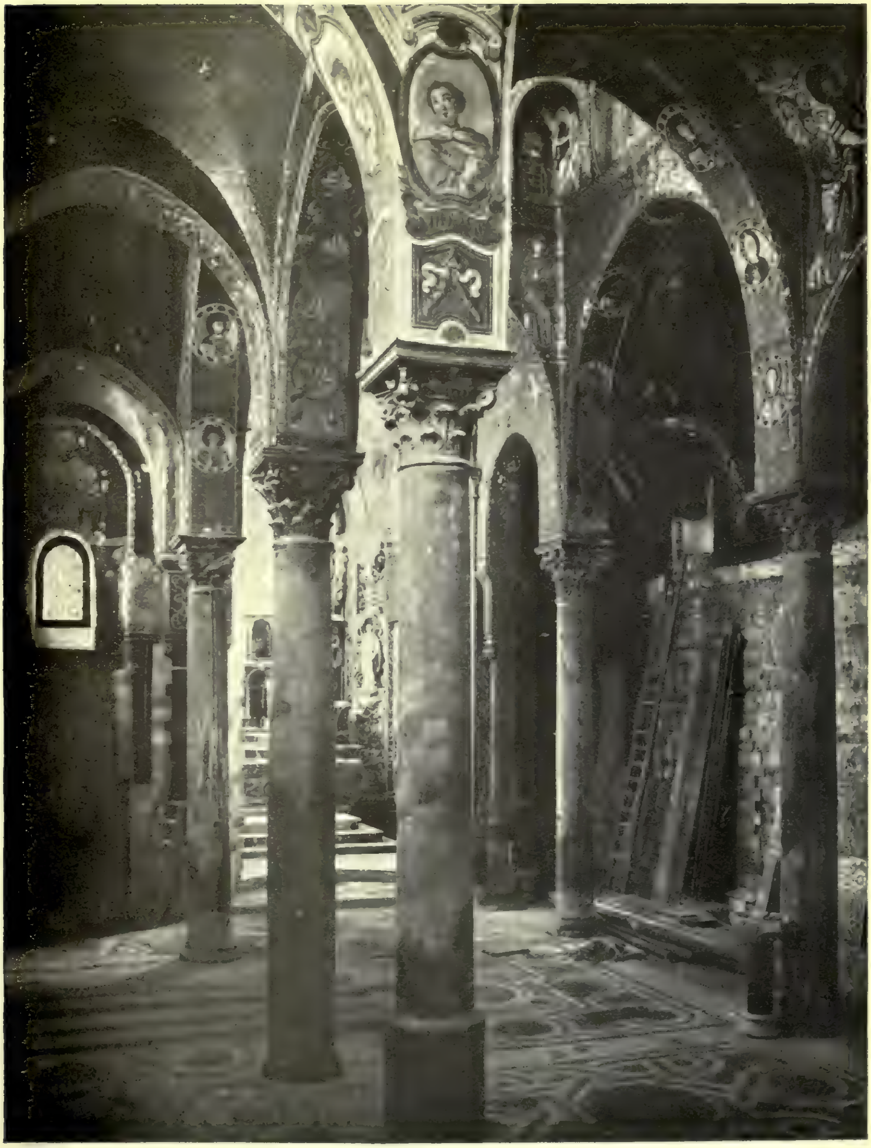
The present exterior of the Santa Maria dell Ammiraglio, as seen from the square, is a careful and pleasant restoration of simple architectural forms, reproducing old lines and proportions still distinctly traceable, or partly *in situ*, when the restoration began, and improvising nothing or very little. It shows the characteristic forms of one of the Byzantine church types of the period; a plain, small, simple square of masonry, supporting a low dome raised on an octagonal drum ; plain walls, unadorned save for shallow, triple-recessed arches or sunk panels forming the windows springing up from the base of the walls. Along the top of the building there runs a Greek inscription on a red ground carved in freestone in bold fine lettering, recording the pious and humble sentiments of the founder Giorgios. Over one ot the side doors the restorer has set up a carved marble lintel (found, I believe, inside), representing an Oriental archer and two nondescript beasties, enclosed in an elegant acanthus scroll ; one of the many instances of the widespread influence and romantic Far Eastern origins of "sea-borne" Byzantine. It evidently hails from Apulia and is a copy in marble on a larger scale of one of these "Byzantine" (Syrian) ivory panels reproducing Sassanian motives that set the imagination of the Western craftsman at work when the sculptor's art began to reawaken.

The interior shows us a cruciform church, with the four spaces between the arms of the cross occupied by intersecting vaults, lower than the rest of the roof, and three apses (originally ; the main apse is gone). The dome over the centre is set on an octagon, obtained by cutting off the angles of the square below by means of recessed niches, and abutted by cylindrical vaults bent to



THE MARTORANA, PALERMO
Restoration begun but not completed.

Incorpora, Palermo

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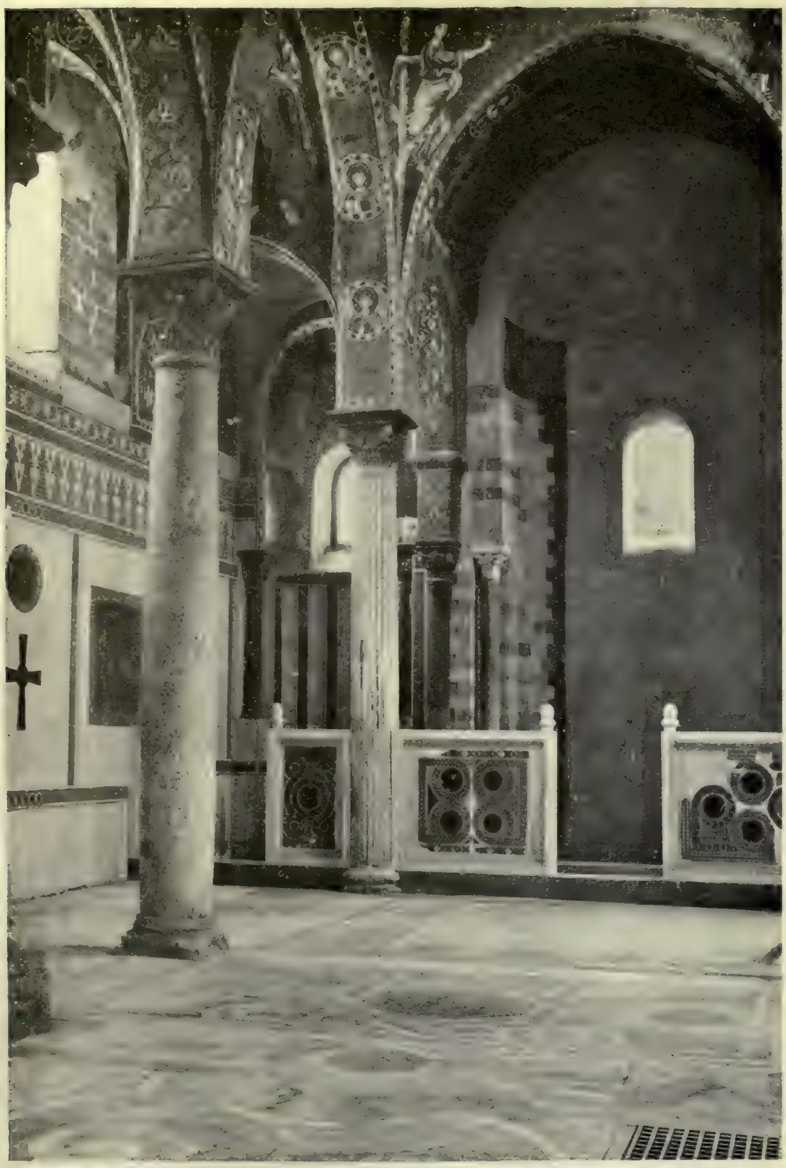
follow the lines of the arches ; two in the side aisles, two spanning the nave. Round the bottom of the dome there runs another inscription discovered during the restoration ; this one in Arabic, painted on wood, in handsome Cufic lettering in white with a floral spray on a black background. (There is a copy in the Museum.) The words are taken from a beautiful, very old Greek Christian hymn. Was there then a large proportion of the Christian population of Palermo that only understood Arabic ? Or does this border, which sets off the mosaics so well, denote a mere fashion in decoration, such as is undeniably met with elsewhere, especially later, making use of the effective play of line of this extremely decorative lettering ? Or must we conclude, with Amari, that this inscription proves the stonemasons to have been Arabs ? The use of the pointed arch, which is of the variety then prevailing in Saracen lands, would lend probability to this assumption.

The dome on corner niches (*à trompes d'angle*) itself might be either Byzantine or Saracenic. There is a very interesting instance at Cairo, in the mosque of El-Azhar, with the suggestive date of A.D. 978 (figured by Saladin). It also occurs in the two famous fifth-century churches of the White and Red Monasteries in Egypt. In any case the constructive form was first found in Persia.

The interior still retains some of the splendour admired by ibn Jubair. The exquisite floor in *opus Alexandrinum* is still there ; the large disks of porphyry and serpentine used up in the later inlays on the walls show that the walls were originally panelled in the same sumptuous way ; in or near the three apses there are ranged eight shafts of priceless dark porphyry with gilt capitals ; two of these evidently Byzantine in the Imperial sense, one (to the left of the main apse) very interesting in its Far Eastern suggestiveness, with carved bulls supporting the abacus at the angles, and exotic water-leaves bearing small trays of fruit ; the others showing variations of what may be called the Sicilian capital, which I shall discuss later.

Finally there are the mosaics, those typical products of the remarkable "Byzantine Renaissance" of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which showed itself in a kind of afterglow of sweet classical grace, mingling naïvely with tender spirituality and quaint love of splendour. It is to painters of this school that the best mosaics of Sicily are due.

In the Martorana all the vaults and arches, the upper part of the walls, and the two little side apses are still covered with glittering mosaics, some fine, some rather uncouth in their bizarre (late) conventionalism, but all full of interest and varied



THE MARTORANA, PALERMO
After the restoration.

charm in their mellow decorative harmony and mystic iconographical unity and concordance.

Thus in the cupola over the sanctuary figuring the vault of Heaven, the figure of Christ Pantocrater (" blessing the world ") occupies the top ot the dome, attendant angels, patriarchs and prophets are ranged in two tiers below, the four Evangelists occupy the four angle recesses. Representations of the two solemn events of the Annunciation and the Presentation in the Temple fill the important spaces above the arches of the solea ; pictures of the Nativity of Christ and the Death of the Virgin (according to the beautiful Greek legend) find place in the nave, the figures of the Apostles in the side aisles, figures of saints and martyrs on the medallions of the archivolts, while Gabriel and Michael are portrayed in the bent barrel vault near the place of the altar, still adoring the Christ in the centre apse—whose figure has disappeared, it is true, but who was evidently there. It is all part of a well-established scheme handed on traditionally, if not then already embodied in some kind of written painters' manual like that of the famous (later) descriptive manual, mediæval in spirit if not in actual date of the copy found (which has not yet been definitely settled, it seems, by Byzantine scholars), discovered by Didron in 1839 in one of the monasteries on

Mount Athos. It was written by Denis, a monk-painter, for the benefit of his fellow-craftsmen, giving them wise and friendly counsel as to how to paint, and what—how to conceive and depict, how and where (in the church) to order and dispose the subjects demanded of them by the theological and liturgical requirements of the clergy. That there were some precepts of the kind, fixed by custom if not yet written down, is proved by the similarity in treatment and iconographical scheme shown in the mosaics of the three typical and representative churches of or near Palermo: the tiny Greek oratory of the Greek Admiral Giorgios, the sumptuous Royal Chapel, still domed and semi-Greek in liturgical intention, and the splendid Latin cathedral attached to the Benedictine monastery of Monreale. At the same time there is enough variation and freedom to show that this agreement was a matter of living tradition, not of soulless copying of set forms.*

A few of these mosaics still belong to the first and best Greek work, distinguished by sweet dignity of conception and rare delicacy of execution. These include the two figures of the archangels, the two panels from the old front representing the Virgin accepting the dedication of the church from Admiral Giorgios, and Christ crowning King Roger—possibly also the charming "stories" in the nave, though these are not entirely convincing. There is a heaviness about the handling of the colour and an emptiness about the facial expression which it is impossible to associate with unspoiled Greek work (such as we know it at Cefalù for instance).

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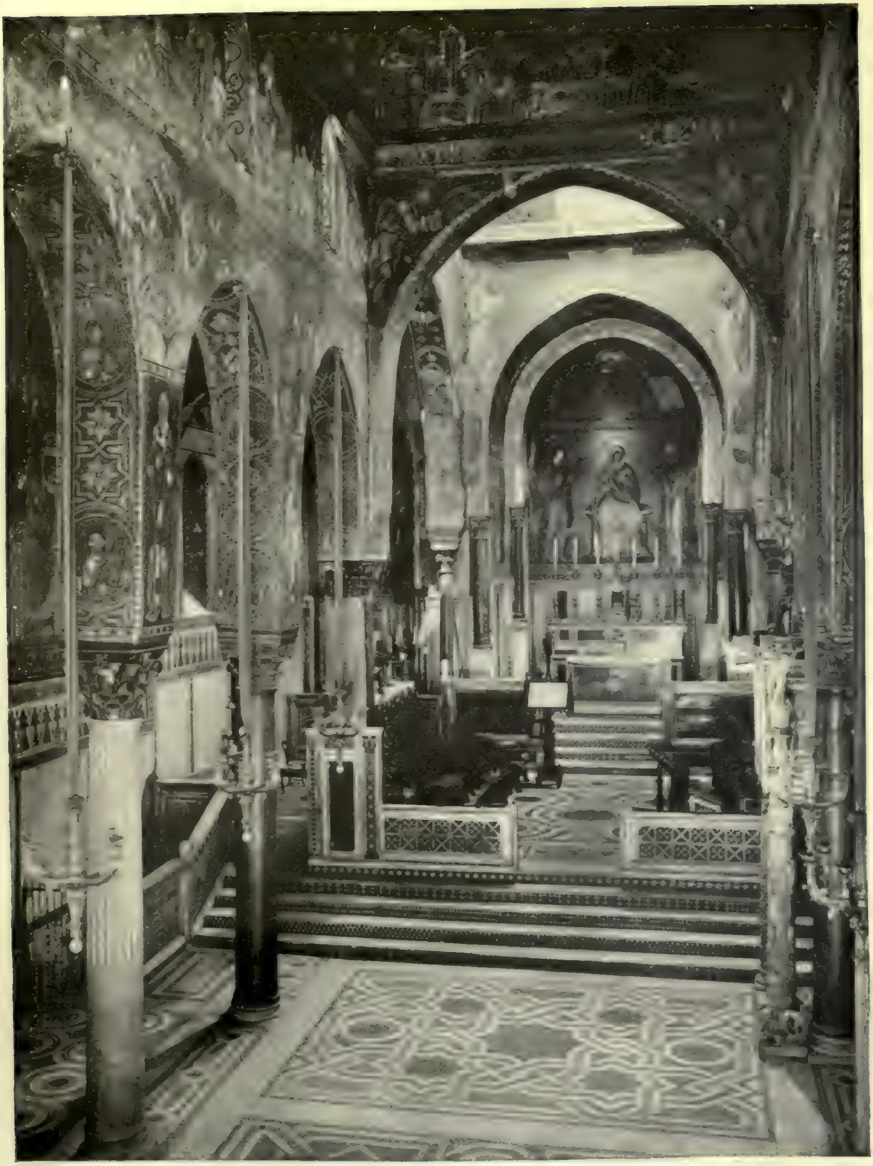
* For further particulars the student is referred to the easily accessible books of Diehl and Zimmermann, who also give good diagrams of the whole iconographical scheme, which I have not found it possible to include here, of the Cappella Palatina and the cathedral of Monreale.

The other panels mentioned are far nearer their original state; the Dedication panel has been clumsily patched, probably when set up again, but the Virgin is a noble figure in her dark graceful Greek draperies, that still retain pure classical folds.

Finer still is the Coronation panel (Pl. III. p. 34) in its absolute simplicity and humanity of action, and quiet excellence of technique. The Martorana, being after all a museum in spite of the associations that cling round it, is a good place for study, so it may be well to compare these panels—with their dignified expression, their fine treatment of hair, features, drapery, their purity of line and rare harmony of dark tones (King Roger's robes are, or were, studded with gems and drops of mother-of-pearl, but the border is a dull ruby colour, the robe a deep blue)—to compare these panels, then, with the later, *i.e.* retouched, ones, with their imbecile staring faces, baggy drapery folds and the disagreeable chalky whites that intrude into the colour.

Yet these, too, merge fairly well into the decorative *ensemble*. An hour or more may be spent very pleasantly at the Martorana, studying the subtle craft of this admirable school of mural decorators. We first notice the deep note of restful contrast struck by the star-spangled blues of the little intersecting vaults at the corners ; the broad neutral bands in mosaic of black on silver of the Greek inscriptions, alternating with the Arabic one mentioned above in the cupola ; the fine spacing throughout ; the intelligent use of pure ornament.

There are several varieties of ornamental borders. Narrow strapped bands studded with crosses or jewels in four varieties of pattern, in tones of dull red and deep green with narrow white rims, are principally used for disguising the blunt edges of the plaster coating, or for bordering the archivolts, twining in medallion loops round the heads of the saints. Two pretty variations of the lotus pattern occur on the narrow wave-mouldings framing the windows. For broader bands there are several combinations of supple foliage and elegant folded buds, flowers and petals in gay shaded tints relieved by white, from the rich Byzantine store of inherited motives. In odd corners, finally, conventionalised



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trees are used as a space-filling device, but there is no crowding anywhere, no awkwardness or unrest.

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There is another of these Greek cruciform churches in Palermo, Sant' Antonio, now restored out of all recognition, and one near Castelvetrano, the Trinità of Delia, differing somewhat from the Martorana in type and treatment. The dome is here (externally) set on a sturdy square, not on an elegant octagon, and the four arms of the cross roofed with tiles, not flat. There is no inscription. The old patina of the walls (in the interior) which came to light when the rough plastering was stripped off, shows that it was never painted. As pointed out by Patricolo ("Arch. Stor. Siciliano," vol. v.), it is therefore interesting as showing us a simple little country church of the period, depending for ornament and expression, probably, on a painted and partly gilt iconostasis screen and other painted wooden partitions, with, we may add, at least one finely wrought and richly coloured hanging, veiling the sanctuary.

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The Cappella Palatina being a Royal Chapel, and small, has always been kept more or less in repair and not been allowed to suffer the total neglect that so often leads to ruthless renovation, according to the fashion of the day. If for this very reason the mosaics have suffered woefully from tinkering; if also the original Byzantine arrangement of the choir must have been far more impressive and solemn than the pretty carved stalls behind the low open-work parapet we now see; if certain stately pieces of church furniture such as an iconostasis are thus missing—the nave, walls and roof have remained virtually unchanged, and the general impression is still the same as when the famous homily was preached by the Greek bishop from the mainland (Rossano), Theophanus Kerameos—the fashionable preacher of the day—at some time, as has been proved, between 1143 and 1149, before King Roger, robed as we see him in the Martorana panel, and addressed by the preacher in Oriental tones of magnificent laudation. Theophanus then goes on to describe this "House of God erected by a truly great and kingly mind, as a durable monument—the corner-stone of his palace." He notices (as we do now) that even he who had seen it again and again, always admires it anew, and he describes it as "gleaming with light, glittering with gold and resplendent with jewels."

Of the ceiling he says that it is a miracle—'cunningly wrought and carved after the fashion of a honeycomb, gleaming with gold throughout, so that it seems like the sky at night when the host of stars twinkle down through the clear air." He notices the columns beautifully supporting the vaults, the "sacred pavement like a meadow in spring, adorned with marbles, as with flowers, only flowers fade, and this meadow is imperishable." The "walls all sheeted with marble—the upper part covered with golden mosaics, where the host of the sacred images does not take up the room."

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The published history of the Cappella Palatina leaves many points obscure—such as the original arrangement and furniture of the choir, or the important date and *provenance* of the Paschal candlestick, that masterpiece of mediæval sculpture. Nor is there a single mention of any of the earlier masters, but the main facts are well known :

It was founded (begun) in 1132, endowed and founded officially on April 28, 1140, from which date there are two deeds preserved in the archive of the Cappella Palatina ; one for use written in ordinary ink on parchment with signatures of witnesses, another magnificent one written in gold on purple. An inscription in Greek verse running round the bottom of the dome records that the mosaics in the dome were completed in 1143. The Saracenic ceiling must also have been completed in the forties, as it was described in Theophanus' sermon; it is, however, known that the mosaics in the nave date from the reign of William I. The next date of importance is 1788, when their Bourbon Majesties from Naples came into residence, and the mosaics of the north wall overlooking the sanctuary were sacrificed to a Royal Gallery communicating with the Palace. It has now been removed and replaced by a gilt grating and a modern mosaic representing John the Baptist in the desert.

The plan is a refined blend; a Western basilican nave with Saracenic pointed arches, terminating in a square Greek solea with two aisles and three apses, and a cupola over the sanctuary.

The square supporting this dome is tall and beautifully lit from above. The result is one of surpassing loveliness in the contrast between the dim rich nave and the gleaming choir, with its wealth of gold and mosaics, set off by the deep repeated tones of the shafts of deep red porphyry in their sockets, by the broad band of Greek inscription on silver, framing the restful apse containing the solemn figure of Christ; with its wonderful play of light and shade, caused by refinements which can only be studied, not described, in the shape and span of the arches, in archivolts and mouldings, in the whole sensitive modelling of the surface over which the glittering skin of the mosaics has been stretched. The colour harmony has the same subtle quality, whether it be on bright days when shafts of sunlight bring out the mystic splendour, the choir below is filled with figures robed in purple and fine linen, among trails of silvery blue smoke, and the exquisite playing of the organ contributes to produce one of the most impressive sensations of the commingling of harmonies that come to one anywhere ; or whether it be on dull days when the radiance is veiled and a soft blue sings predominant, peaceful and soothing. Gradually, as the tourists troop off to other sights, the space is filled with the silent music of visual harmony, sublime and full of suggestive re-evocation, as it always is to those who give ear, until suddenly, quietly, irresistibly, you feel yourself surrounded as by a living Presence, by the fervour and perseverance and joy of the men who built it. The Cappella Palatina may be the product of an art doomed to finish soon, but for one ineffable moment it has given us all that art can give.

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For the decoration of this sanctuary all the resources of the Mediterranean have been drawn upon. Many of the most costly varieties of building-stone known, antique or new-quarried, white Parian marble, dark Oriental granite, wavy cipollino with its silvery patina, *fior di persico* with its purple bloom, grey granite and deep red porphyry, have been employed for the supports of the nave, the smaller shafts bearing the pulpit or let in at the angles of the apses, for paving the floor and sheeting the walls. The pavement is a masterpiece of elaborate *opus Alexandrinum*, Italo-Byzantine, showing bands and panels of parcel mosaic of coloured marbles, and disks of serpentine and porphyry, inlaid in a framework of creamy white Parian. Encrusted in the cipollino panels of walls, parapet, pulpit, &c., we find other varieties of the same beautiful workmanship.

The patterns of this parcel mosaic show a double origin ; in some we find the well-known mosaic borders in gilt *tesseræ* and coloured marbles of contemporary "Cosmati" work—the Roman development of the Alexandrine prototype—also pretty little conventional trees, birds and sprays. Others are strikingly Saracenic in their use of the five-tongued "battlement" motive (derived from the palmetto), or of mosaic bands in which white predominates, in a kind of pleasing filigree or lace-work braid of narrow strips of opaque white paste.

The two original doors let into this lovely panelling are of bronze with a fine cast decoration of lions' heads and bold quaint acanthus.

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The mosaics praised by Theophanus were doubtless originally Greek work. There has been, as I remarked, a good deal of restoration throughout ; those that have suffered most are those in the apse below the Christ, which are ruined ; the Christ is still however fine, the Biblical scenes on the south wall very fine and sweet indeed, and probably near the original Greek work in their simple charm of narrative treatment, suave melody of line, exquisite gay colour and free handling of the technique. An excellent place for observing this is the pulpit, where the supple freedom of the lines of the *tesseræ* of these panels can be contrasted side by side with the more mechanical work in the side aisles, due probably to Sicilian pupils of the first Greek masters. Yet even these still retain, as a whole, the impressiveness and charm of a great and noble tradition of expressive and decorative art.

The solemn and majestic iconographical scheme, fraught with the impressive poetry of the early Church, of these mosaics is that of the Sta. Maria dell' Ammiraglio, amplified by representations of the great festivals of the Ascension and the Pentecost over the prothesis and the diakonikon, by scenes from the New Testament on the walls overlooking the sanctuary, from the Old Testament on the walls of the nave, and from the legends of St. Peter and St. Paul on the walls of the side aisles. There is also, naturally, a fuller representation of the Heavenly Host of angels and saints and dignitaries.

The pretty Nativity scene occurring also in the Sta. Maria dell' Ammiraglio has here been amplified—so as to fill more space and run round an awkward corner—in a most interesting way, showing the artistic freedom with which the traditional motives were handled. Figures and accessories have been moved, and even altered, to make it "compose better," the figures of the Three Wise Men have been added, and there is what looks like a personal touch in the two little angels peeping down at the scene over the edge of the rock.

The decorative scheme also has been drawn from the same source as the Sta. Maria dell' Ammiraglio, but with a freer and more lavish hand, with a possible admixture of Saracenic influence. Artists and lovers of ornament and the suggestions that come from ornament, will find the pure ornament of the Cappella Palatina a source of great joy.

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Above all this Christian splendour, appealing alike to the imagination and the finer senses, the famous honeycomb ceiling is hung aloft like an enchanted twilight vision of the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," with dream-like glimpses of the garden of Omar Khayyám. Nothing affords more striking proof of the irrepressible vitality and insidious charm of Arab art than this ceiling, with its representation of Persian and pagan subjects: winged genii that cannot be interpreted as angels, dancing voluptuous houris, that cannot possibly be mistaken for martyrs, gazelles, antelopes, elephants, and other Far Eastern animals which might have aroused suspicion; subjects even drawn from Persian or Hindoo mythology.

How could the clergy allow it? Or were they not such jealous guardians of the iconographical orthodoxy of their churches as some recent (French) authors would fain have us believe?

A good deal is explained, I think, by the simple fact that wooden roofs were then still the prevailing fashion (there are timber roofs in the Magione and in Sto. Spirito, in the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale). Now the marvellous skill of the Arab in the joining, carving and adorning of wood, would then be highly appreciated, and the Mohammedan craftsmen simply called in to do their best, unhampered by foolish restrictions, in their own inherited way, passed on from father to son. It is probable that most of the *subjects* meant as little to the men that painted them as they did to Bishop Theophanus ; a mere twinkling down of stars from the regions of fancy.

The ceiling is remarkable for the rich combination of carving, gilding and painting. A fine design of interlocked stars, carved, painted and gilt, enclosing a double row of large sunk rosettes, with eight concave petals, is supported on a broad beautiful cornice of ingenious bracketing, all in wood, over which linen has been stretched (except on the carved surfaces) for painting in *tempera*. Most of the gilding has now fallen off ; the effect still seems the same owing to the liberal use of white lettering on the warm buffs of the woodwork and the fantastic play of shadows and reflections among all this broken and blended colour. The palette comprises white, black (greenish), another dull greenish tone used in the foliage, buff, two dull blues, two reds ; one of these a full exquisite Oriental vermilion, generally used in figure panels in combination with an equally exquisite and Oriental soft green.

The roof has been restored; witness the inscription in lovely Renaissance lettering to "Ioannes. Sicilie. Rex. Aragonum. A.D. 1478." Is it possible that the craftsmen-restorers were Spanish Arabs?

The famous Arabic inscription painted on the rims of the stars aforesaid (*i.e.* on twenty-two of the twenty-four), generally interpreted as referring to Roger, is in itself only an iteration of high-sounding words like "Riches and Perfection and Prosperity and Humanity and Possession and Health and Power and Victory and Munificence and Possessions and Magnificence," &c., "a mere string of words put there for ornament and nothing more," (says Amari), with a general reference to desirable blessings. The lean-to roofs of the side aisles also have fine wooden ceilings painted less elaborately by the same school of craftsmen.

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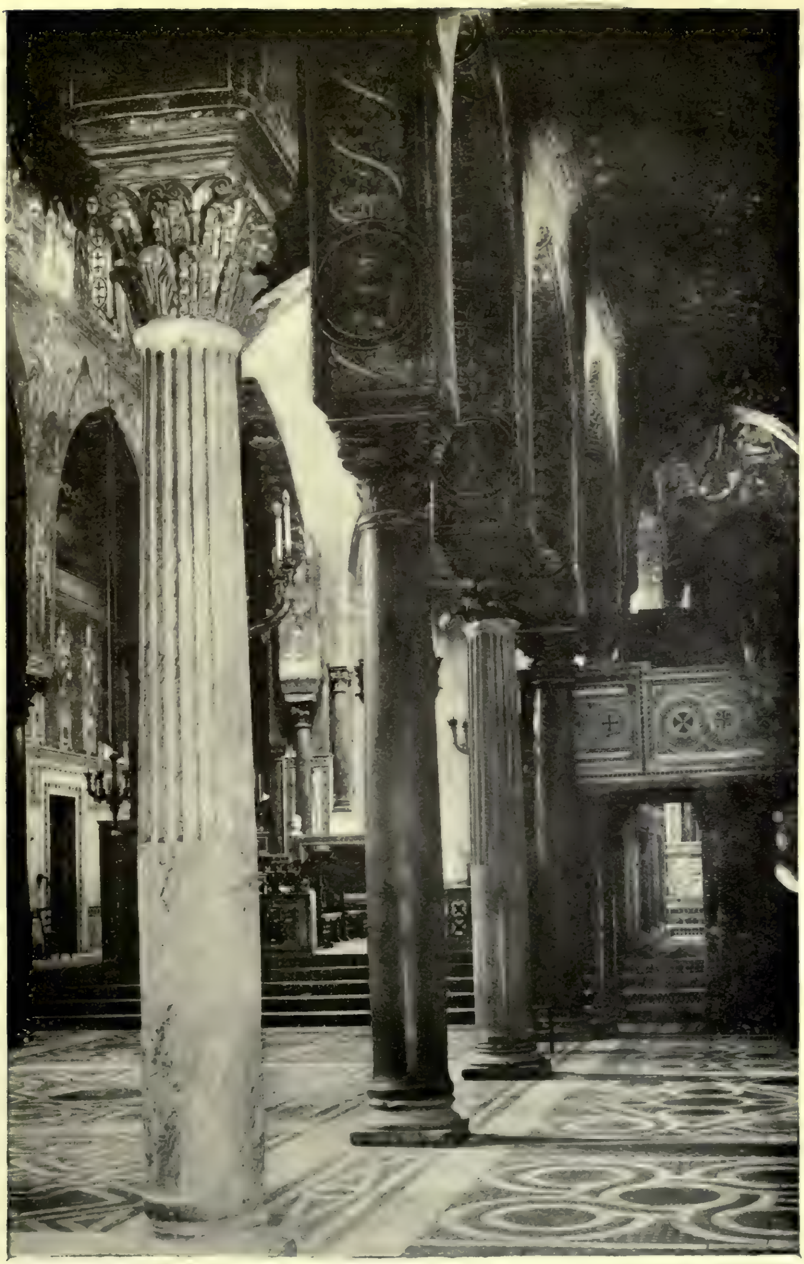
In the midst of all this, Western Art, the newcomer, holds its own in the superb Paschal candlestick (*see* Frontispiece) of the tall Southern type, the work of a great individual master but the product of a primitive school. It is doubly young: full of splendid energy of youth in movement and sentiment, yet quaintly awkward in places, hampered as it were by the queer little conventions always characteristic of youth. The general conception shows so much fire, so much mastery of the essentials of the sculptor's art, which are movement, passion, life; the decorative detail is so fine and free and instinct with the spirit of the whole; the scrolls are so superbly imaginative, and the light and dark is so masterly that it gives one almost a shock to come nearer and notice the rough "Romanesque" imperfections of the little figures, the square biggish heads, the clumsy hands, the shallow folds of the scant ugly drapery. On the other hand, the acanthus is Greek, and almost classically Greek—the sculptor has evidently seen and studied a Græco-Roman candlestick; the birds Byzantesque in their distinction and perfection. The famous scroll again, consisting of beasts and huntsmen intertwined in elegant fantastic coils, belongs to the interesting motives (mainly transmitted by means of imported rugs, ivories and other smaller objects) derived from Persian (Sassanian) art *viâ* Syria and the Byzantine Empire, and used up by Western and notably Apulian sculptors in new combinations. The "wild beasts" forming the base are quite Apulian in style. All points to the imperfect but active and assimilative school of South-Eastern Italy as the home of the master of the candlestick; he was certainly not Norman, and it is extremely unlikely that he was by birth a



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Sicilian. Figure sculpture had not thriven under the rule of either Saracen princes or Greek clerics. When the Latin clergy came (principally, be it noted, from the domains of the Norman rulers on the mainland, and only exceptionally from the home of their race in Normandy) with their Latin demand for expression in stone, they would naturally, according to the custom in those days, call in the masters whose work they had known and admired already. There is plenty of related work on the mainland in King Roger's and William's own cities of Trani and Bari, and elsewhere. If there is nothing quite so important in church furniture as this candlestick, or in architectural *ensemble* as the somewhat later cloister of Monreale, this is easily explainable when we recall the fact that Palermo was, for a short time of almost unnatural brilliancy, the capital.

The top of the candlestick, which is later, but a happy continuation of the movement, not a clumsy after-thought, belongs to the Neo-Campanian school of "Premature Renaissance," of which there is another instance at Monreale in the knob or ball at the top of the lovely well-known fountain.

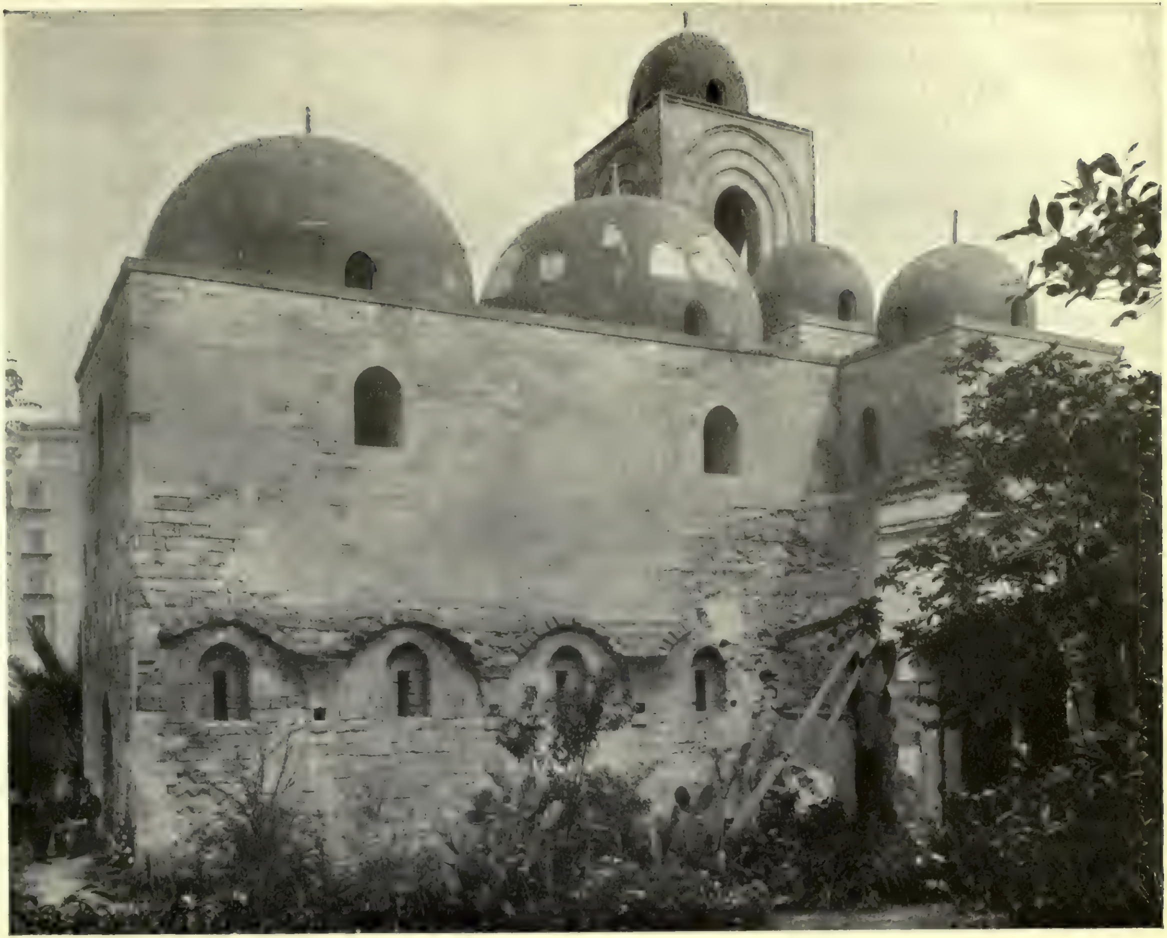
⁂

The capitals of the Cappella Palatina are worthy of notice both for intrinsic beauty and for quaint polyglot suggestion. There are classical forms, pure Byzantine forms (such as the lovely vine-leaf capital with its fine undercut dark depths, which also occurs in St. Mark's in Venice), others that seem Byzantesque (Italo-Byzantine or possibly Siculo-Byzantine), and in the side apses also several charming little Sicilian forms.

Among the smaller churches, two small Royal Chapels must first be mentioned, both resembling the Cappella Palatina, but very small and hence modified in arrangement, one at the palace of Favarah and one at the Zisa. Both have tiny niches instead of apses for the prothesis and diakonikon, a narrow sanctuary running across the breadth of the church in front of them and divided off from the nave by a wall with a central arch. The dome of the Favarah chapel is supported on angle niches, the dome of the Zisa chapel on, as it were, a saddle of honeycomb brackets and squinches of masonry, built out from the wall and thus ingeniously converting the oblong into an octagon for supporting the dome.

The little church of S. Giovanni dei Lepprosi has been mentioned above (p. 138). In type it resembles the Cappella Palatina on a smaller scale.

Of the many other Arabo-Byzantine churches that grew up in Palermo during the twelfth



Alinari

S. GIOVANNI DEGLI EREMITI, PALERMO

p. 171

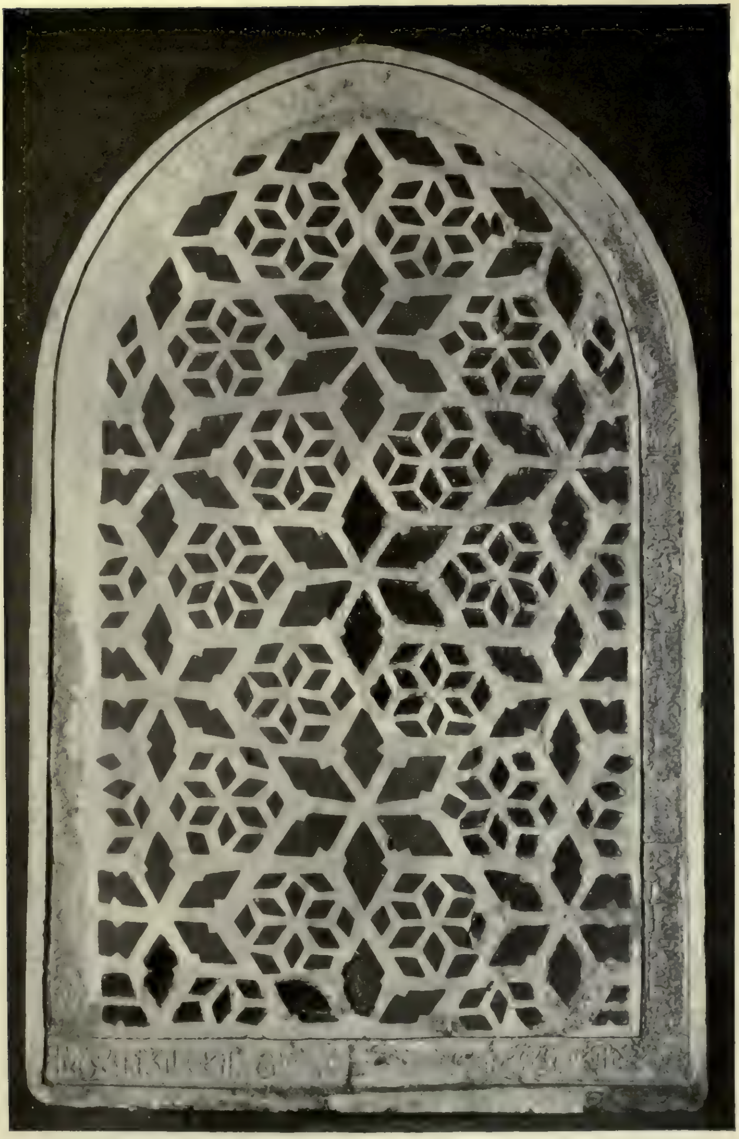
century only four now remain: Sant' Antonio, now dressed up in queer Romantic trappings; Santa Maria Maddalena, semi-ruined and bare; and the two now so well-known churches of San Giovanni degli Eremiti and San Cataldo, both hardly recognisable among the *débris* of centuries, when Patricolo set about the work of restoration, after Sicily had become Italian. The domes of San Cataldo were actually discovered accidentally, it is said, in a loft above the board ceiling of what was then the post office, in a "queer disused old building that had once been a church." Both churches are now carefully restored, and internally provide excellent opportunities for sober study, while externally they contribute a good deal to give Palermo its Oriental physiognomy; San Cataldo, with its three red dish-cover domes and pretty battlements, San Giovanni with five domes, rising above the luxuriant vegetation of the charming well-known garden and the picturesque arcades of the oft-depicted little cloister.

The monastery of San Giovanni was founded by King Roger in the lovely quiet quarter of gardens and monasteries on the banks of the Kemonia river, near the "very old church" of San Giorgio in Kemonia, said to be existing when Gregory the Great founded the first Benedictine monastery in Sicily, dedicated to Sant' Ermete (Hermes?), on the site of the later monastery and church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti (corrupted from Ermete).

It was a favourite creation of King Roger's, who decreed that it was to be the burial-place of the royal family and notables of the court, and the abbot "as our chaplain and father confessor" to rank before all other prelates of the kingdom.

There is a curious building mixed up with this church of San Giovanni; a cross-vaulted oblong with traces of a large courtyard and well for ablutions, by some writers believed to be a pre-existing mosque; this building has not yet, however, as far as I know, been really studied by an Orientalist in archæology. In plan and construction the church of San Giovanni seems to belong to the type evolved in Asia Minor, classed as "Domed basilicas," and thus hints at the variety of architectural forms that diversified the aspect of Mediæval Palermo. In our study of Palermo, and indeed of all early mediæval architecture, we must always remember that the monuments now so diligently studied as "types" are mere survivals of an abundant blossoming, which may have borne forms now lost.

Informally, San Giovanni may perhaps be described as a little group of domed cells opening into one another, very Oriental in suggestion externally, with the grand simple lines of the dignified dome-



FRAGMENTS OF PLASTER WINDOW FOUND IN
S. GIOVANNI DEGLI EREMITI

Now in the Museum, Palermo.

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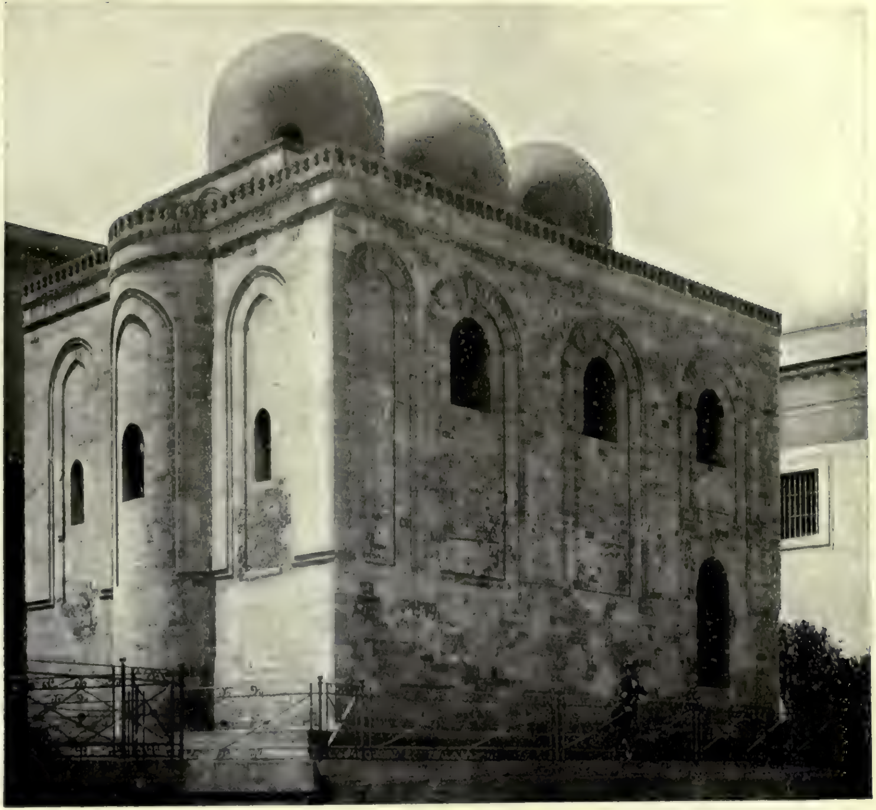

Alinari SAN CATALDO, PALERMO *p.* 173

capped tower rising from it ; a suggestion enhanced and set off by the playful Western grace of the little later cloister. The interior contains one decorative feature of great interest in the little window of pressed open-work stucco between the first and second bays, very Cairene in design (the precious frail original is now preserved in the Museum—Pl. XXI.). Otherwise this interior, like that of San Cataldo, is, in its soberly restored state, chiefly remarkable as showing us the bare bones of the domed construction before it was spread over with the thick, fine, softly modulated surface of plaster.

San Cataldo is another little domed basilica—only in this case the plan is purely basilican, the three domes resting on arches supported by columns, not on piers built out from the wall as in San Giovanni, and there is no belfry.

San Cataldo was originally one of several private chapels attached to the luxurious private houses of this favourite boulevard. It seems to have been built for the great Chancellor Majone of Bari, and was completed before 1161, when the wealthy nobleman, Sylvester, Count of Marsico, who had bought the houses confiscated after the death of Majone, buried a daughter there. It still retains the ancient altar and the greater part of the beautiful original floor in *opus Alexandrinum*.

Noticeable features of the exterior are the pretty Saracenic battlements with the Arabic inscription below.

⁂

Two of the capitals in San Cataldo are of special interest as representing one of the most charming types of Corinthian derivatives that I know of anywhere, in the elegant freedom and fine artistic logic with which the fanciful decorative device of the braided coil, picked up somewhere in the East, has been amalgamated with the old components of the classical Corinthian capital. The faraway classical prototype is still recognisable in typical distribution of parts, in characteristic profile, but the capital has become a new thing of delicate basket-work, cunningly wrought round the marble core in intertwined strands (traceable from beginning to end), curling up at the lower angles into a kind of loop-leaf with edges indented like an acanthus leaf. There are only five of these curious capitals known to me, two in San Cataldo, two under the pulpit in the Cappella Palatina, and one, with some transitional forms, in the cloister of Cefalù ; all differing slightly in (basket-work) pattern and in refinement of carving.

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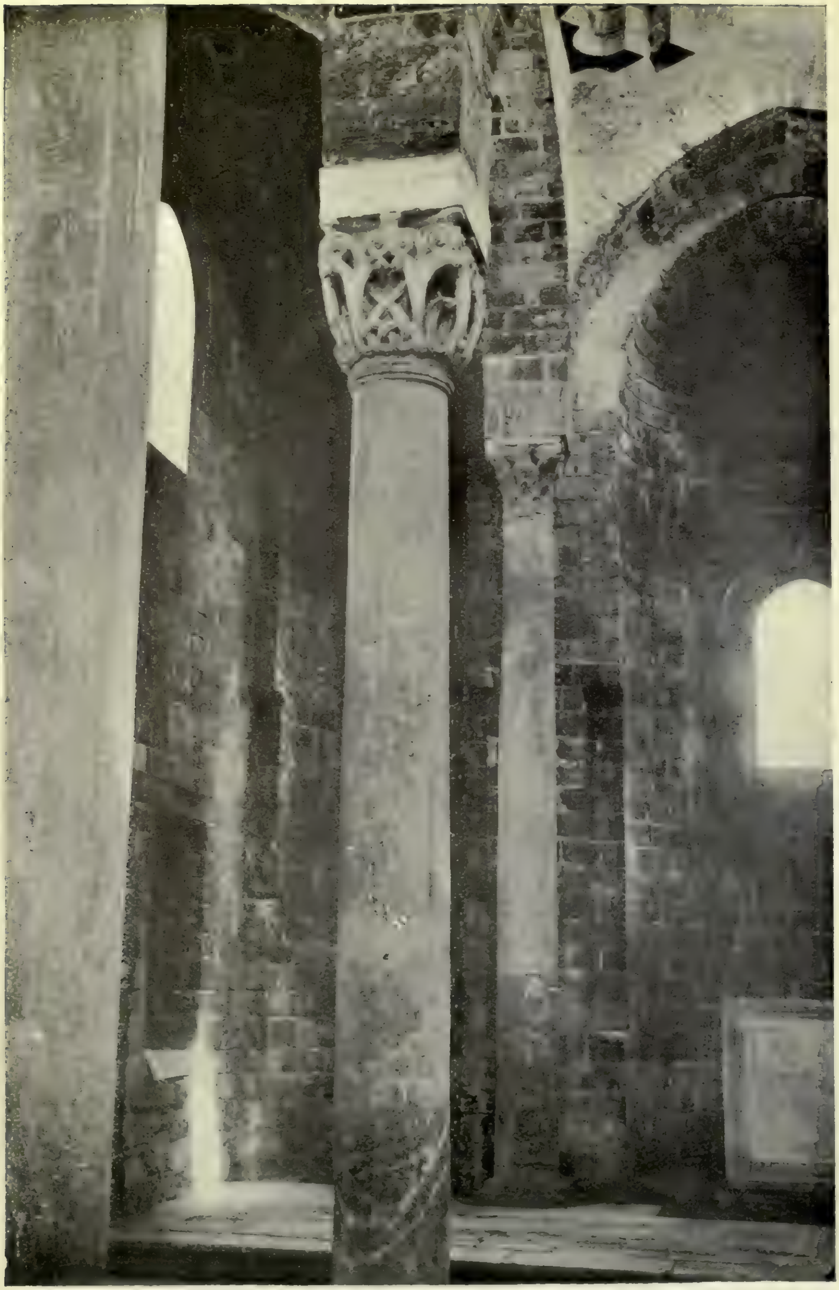

INTERIOR OF SAN CATALDO, PALERMO

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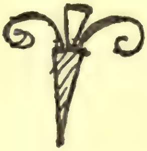
For other types as well, Norman Palermo is a limited but happy hunting-ground for the lover and student of capitals, those curious exponents of the processes of evolution in art. It is not so with carved ornament on bands, panels, and the like. Doorways were simple; the panels of the choir screens, pulpits and the like inlaid, not carved; the little carved leaf-moulding framing these, delicate but monotonous. But capitals at the top of the shafts there must be, old classical for choice, as the simplest way, or imported from the famous workshops of Byzantium, then the capital of art, or those nearer at hand in the old Italo-Byzantine provinces; or, possibly, carved in Palermitan workshops. So the suggestions of their capitals are as varied and polyglot as their civilisation; elegant melodious Greek and dignified Latin mingling with refined Arabic and composite Byzantine, and the tentative forms of new idioms.

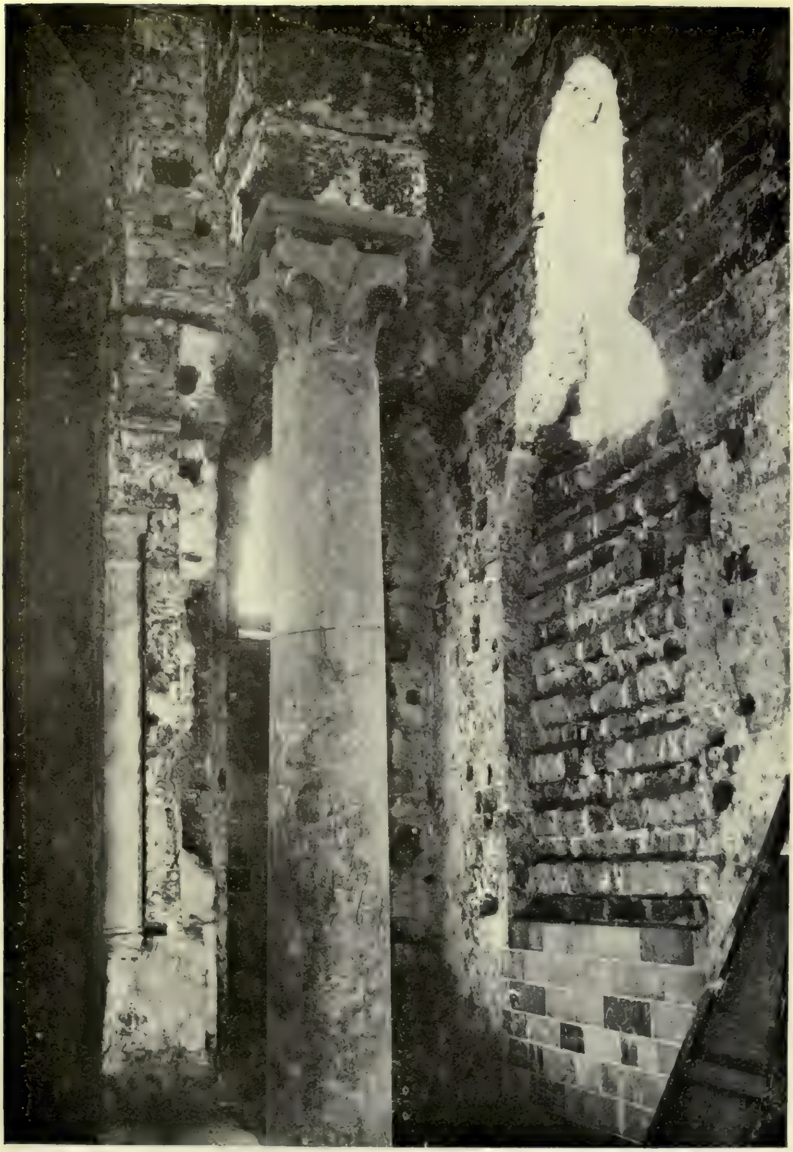
A fascinating side issue this, of the gradual transformation of the lovely classical Corinthian capitals to the many quaint and comely forms of Corinthian derivatives of mediæval architecture, through a long series of apparent decay.

For obvious reasons the rude earliest phases of this process, as represented for instance by the work of Italo-Byzantine stonemasons on the mainland, would during the two centuries of Arab rule not be represented in Sicily. Their place in the chain of filiation is possibly taken by the Saracenic capitals, themselves an emanation from Byzantium. At least it is impossible not to see the connection between the



scheme, to express it diagrammatically, to which all components (except four leaves at the corners) of the pure classical Corinthian capital have been reduced on the Saracenic capitals of Palermo, and the predilection for this scheme on later Sicilian capitals.

Like all other forms of straightforward decorative art, uninfluenced by modern unrest, capitals are never invented. They have grown up naturally in the soil of tradition, represented by the models available for copying by the carver, by the visual impressions that surround and impress him, or by some reminiscence, maybe, as so often during the early formative period in Western Europe, of something that has struck and lingered in his fancy as a vague and often distorted visual recollection. A field of study is opened up here of the greatest interest to those curious to puzzle over the



SANTA MARIA MADDALENA, PALERMO

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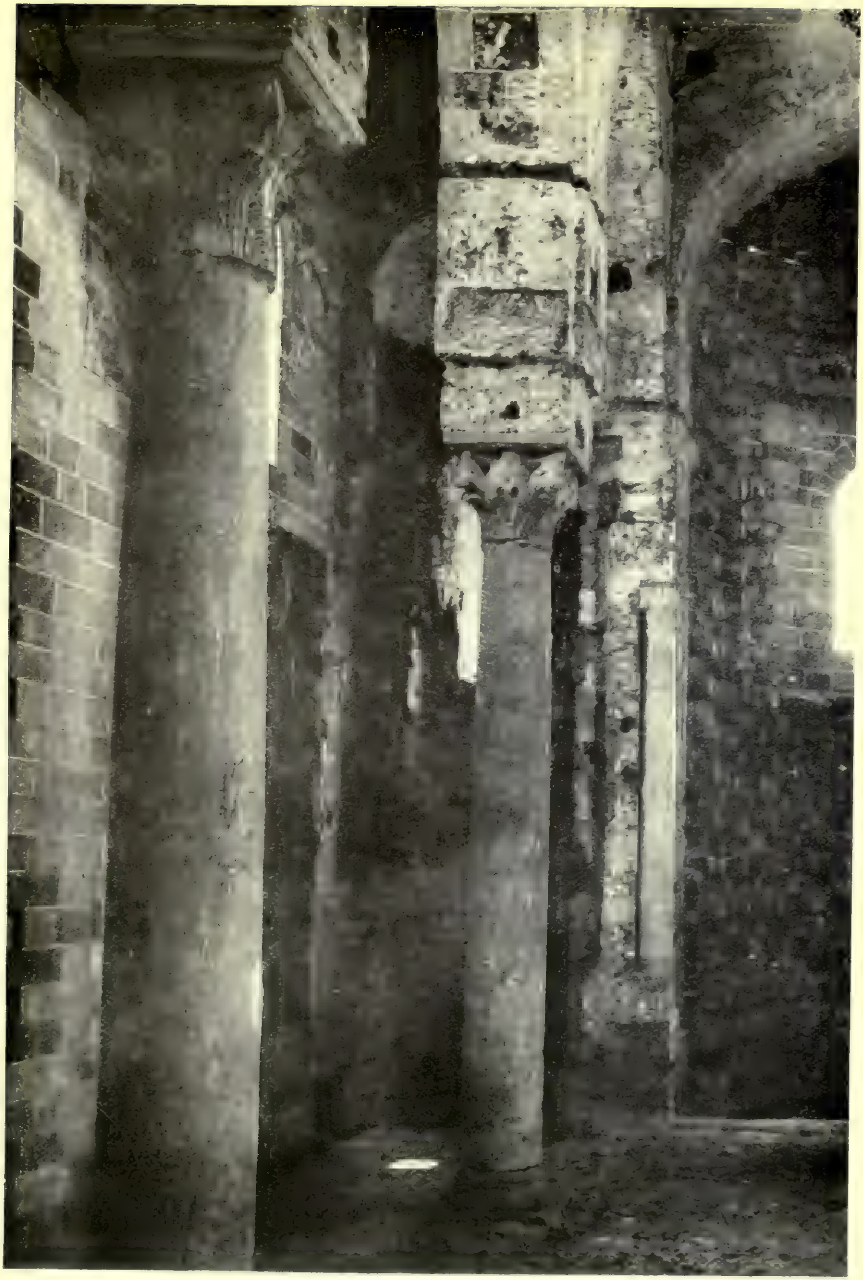
recondite laws of unconscious artistic selection obscurely at work in the dull minds of the unskilled early carvers, and prompting one man to see, and hence carry away, a memory of *mass* (representing first the acanthus leaves as mere knobs or slabs, and the salient mass of dark and light of the central palmetto leaf in and below the abacus of some Corinthian capitals, by a wedge-shaped lump with a rude semblance of a leaf carved on it), or of *line* (which is apt to become wiry), or even, when exceptionally gifted with observation, of *foliage*, replacing the acanthus by a girdle of quaint childish leaves and adding some queer spirals, evidently haunting his memory as there somehow. Others produce mere grotesques, showing that the stonemasons of the Dark Ages were not all mute inglorious Miltons—in carving.

This early phase is naturally not represented in Palermo, but there are interesting instances of a later or secondary phase which we may perhaps think of as grown up out of the first phase with the growth and consolidation of manual skill, yet influenced by direct visual impressions of the highly prized classical capitals that then still had the freshness and prestige of things that are the fashion. Twelfth-century Western Europe was still everywhere Romanesque in the widest sense, impelled to imitation of certain definite forms by the glamour surrounding the Roman Empire, enthroned in ancient Rome, or flourishing Byzantium. In the San Cataldo capital for instance, mentioned above, the assimilation and adaptation of the basketwork were the obscure work of centuries, the crispness and Greekness of outline probably due to imitation of some fine Corinthian model which had burst upon the vision of the skilled craftsman as a fresh source of joy. The other pretty types of Corinthian derivatives here figured doubtless occur elsewhere, as in contemporary Pisa and Lucca, but prevail in Sicily. The characteristic features are, leaving aside all Græco-Roman technical terms, unknown to the carvers, who only saw suggestions of form, a pair of spirals or widely spreading folded leaves growing up as it were, at first one pair, later two, directly out of a central stem or twisted holder, with a leaf, flower, or something like a stiff little brush growing up out of the centre. One is constantly running up against it in Palermo, on the Martorana tower, in the Cappella Palatina, in the church of the Magione, in Santa Maria Maddalena, even in later capitals of the cloister of Monreale. It survives, modified, into Gothic times, such as they were in Palermo, as for instance on the western towers of the cathedral, or the charming little cloister of San Domenico, both dating from the fourteenth century.

XXV



SANTA MARIA MADDALENA, PALERMO

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SANTA MARIA MADDALENA

Alongside of these two well-known churches the little-known church of Santa Maria Maddalena should not be left unnoticed. It is left stranded in the midst of a large sunny barrack-yard, the only waif surviving of the many small churches once occupying, with their convents and gardens, the *plano* of the Royal Palace or upper part of the inner city. A small, nay, a tiny basilica of three bays only, resembling San Cataldo in plan, but with three apses at the east end, it had at least one dome, as shown by the recessed niches over the easternmost bay. The dome has fallen in; the round hole in the roof is now covered by a rough roof of tiles put up in the nineties, when the ruined building was put roughly into repair. At some time during the late Renaissance the walls of the short nave were raised, windows were put in, and a barrel-vault built over the nave; but the little church still retains several of its original columns with antique shafts of exquisite beauty and interesting varied twelfth-century capitals.

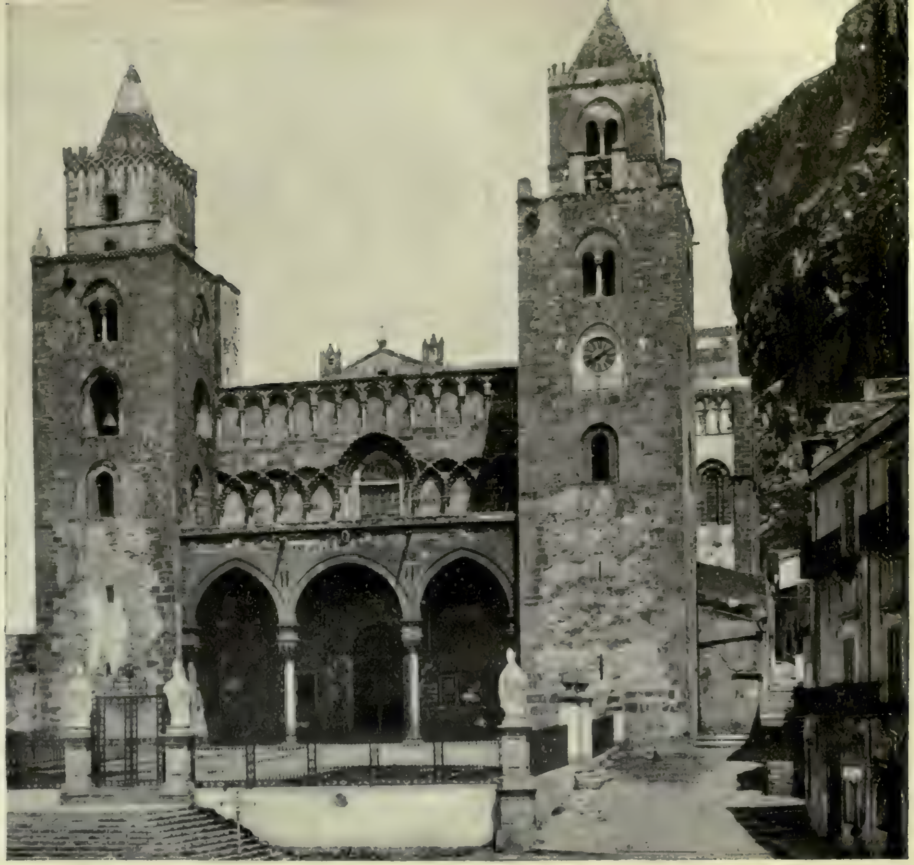
CHAPTER VIII

THE CATHEDRAL OF CEFALÙ AND THE ABBEY CHURCH OF SS. PIETRO E PAOLO D'AGRÒ

The contrast between the churches of Palermo and the Cathedral of Cefalù is undoubtedly striking.

With its mighty mass and impressive towers, its heavy, fantastic, nay, haphazard roofing and broken skyline—the Latin cruciform plan so unmistakably expressed by the exterior, the tall narrow east limb and transept crowned with the mysterious blind arcade of intersecting arches rising up high above the short arms of the lower side aisles, nestling into the angles, with corbel-tables visible above the tops of eucalyptus- and fig-trees—it indeed seems a foreigner and an alien in the magnificent Sicilian landscape (*see* Pl. VII. p. 94).

This impression has, no doubt, contributed to the formation of the archæological legend of a Norman style, brought with them to Sicily by the invaders. People are apt to forget that the founder of Cefalù was a Norman only in name, born in Sicily from an Italian mother, late in his father's



Alinari FAÇADE OF CATHEDRAL, CEFALÙ *p.* 180

life, after almost a lifetime spent in Sicily and South Italy. In the absence of all published documentary evidence testifying to the presence of either Norman workmen, or a body of Norman clergy who might, as those were still the days of monkcraft, have brought personal knowledge of building traditions, and perhaps one or two stonemasons to help carry them out—in the absence of any facts of this nature it is well to give heed to the unfailing common sense of M. Camille Enlart (*see* Michel, "Histoire de l'Art," vol. i. p. 555): "L'influence des Normands n'a pas été considérable dans le royaume des Deux-Siciles, où ces conquérants avisés se sont attachés a tirer parti des éléments qu'ils ont rencontrés bien plus qu'à imposer leurs usages. Il est d'autant plus difficile de démêler ce qui revient à leur influence que le style normand offre toute une série d'analogies avec ceux des écoles germanique et lombarde."

It is unnecessary to discuss these analogies in detail here, all the more that the questions raised by Cefalù can only be solved after the building has been thoroughly examined and the archives carefully searched through by a competent scholar-architect. Few monuments would better repay study than this curious exponent of the varied impulses from all sides, fermenting in the crucible of the early Middle Ages.

Meanwhile it seems to me that presumptive evidence is more in favour of a Lombard (Southern Italian) origin than of anything else. The clergy put in (according to Pirro, a sixteenth-century authority, who is trustworthy on the whole) were Augustinian canons from Bagnara in Calabria ; and those were still the days of monkcraft, when the clergy attached to any church, large or small, would naturally be put in charge of the building of the church, even when built for them by a powerful patron. The grotesque capitals in the interior, the upper blind arcading of the exterior, the two massive western towers might as well be Romanesque in general as locally Norman ; there is only one feature, a few stray capitals of the fluted type which the present writer must confess to not having been able to discover, which refuses to come into line as anything but Norman from Normandy. The prevailing type of cap, a simple bell with plain upright leaves, is more French than anything in type, but not exclusively French.

Our illustration (*cf.* Pl. VII. p. 94) will spare me further general description of the exterior, beyond mentioning that there is a mighty arch visible in the west wall of the transept over the nave, showing the ornate and stately exterior of the east end and the transepts to be earlier than the far ruder and simpler nave, with its simple row of recessed arch windows.

⁂

Before discussing the interior there are three documentary facts—in this case inscriptions—to be mentioned :

A Latin inscription, beneath the Apostles in the apse, commemorates the founding by King Roger and the completion of the mosaics in the apse in 1148.

An inscription, less important, on the beams of the painted timber roof of the nave gives the date of 1263 (presumably for the restoration of the paintings).

Finally, the west front bears the important inscription by the side of the main window :

> "ANNO DOMINICE INCARNATIONIS, M.CC.XL, MENSE AUGUSTI, XIII INDICTIONE, PER MANUM JOHANNIS PANICTERAE."

⁂

The ground plan of Cefalù differs from that of the Palermitan churches hitherto considered in having a true transept and a Latin presbytery, not a Greek sanctuary with a solea. This chancel of two bays has ribbed cross-vaults. It is these vaults that have given rise to so much discussion. Are they later than the adjoining apse, definitely dated, as pointed out above, as completed in 1148? The charming figures in mosaics of angels in the vaults are certainly later than the dated ones in the apse, and are in style akin to the fine work, which has lately begun to be appreciated, of the Roman school of the thirteenth century.

It is hard to believe at first that the nave of Cefalù is later than the east end, so great is the contrast between the whitewashed simplicity, the low proportions of the timber-roofed nave, the rugged, almost barbaric uncouthness of the grotesque capitals flanking the main arch, and the gleaming lofty chancel, with its exquisite mosaics, its fine, if still massive ribbed vaulting, supported on well-constructed engaged shafts springing up from the floor.

Further examination discloses, however, that there are two tiers of superposed engaged shafts flanking the main arch between transept and nave, the upper tier now useless, but evidently meant to support the arch visible higher up in the outer wall. The nave is therefore later, but in my opinion not much later. The pointed arches are still markedly Saracenic in type and indeed recessed one step; the columns and capitals are classical, or early Corinthian derivatives.

This nave has an open timber roof, of the type prevalent in Sicily throughout the Middle Ages, stained dark and painted in polychrome. Among the twelth- and thirteenth-century motives there are sunk Saracenic stars, coloured red, and the spirited little "Persian" genre subjects mentioned above (p. 27) as suggesting that the Cappella Palatina ceiling was not the only instance of Muslim painting in Christian churches.* The north transept has a plain dark timber roof, also the crossing, this set on saddlewise; the south transept has, instead, rather ungainly ribbed vaulting (whitewashed), corresponding to the heavy waggon-headed mass on the roof seen in our illustration (p. 94). Along the top of the walls of the transepts there runs a low, round-arched inner gallery or open arcade, with sturdy shafts and pretty bell capitals, sometimes mistakenly mentioned as a Norman clerestory.†

There are no windows to speak of and no grouping of high and low openings. The cut given in Serradifalco, to which this impression is due, is incorrect.

⁂

A charming feature of the exterior is the porch between the two western towers, with its carved doorway in crisp elegant Romanesque, scrolls full of mediæval sap, of imaginative and joyous conceits, restrained by a clear sense of style, alternating with fine rosettes, all different, in sunk panels, and flat bands of a very shallow chevron or delicate classical mouldings : just the clear-cut elegant Romanesque that might hail from anywhere—Central or Southern France, the Rhineland, Lombardy or Lombard Apulia—except Normandy. A couple of the well-known Lombard grotesque beasties, used as brackets, point to Lombardy or Apulia. The pilasters and band of capitals have disappeared.

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* I owe my knowledge of these delightful paintings, not easily studied from below, to the excellent copy in water-colour prepared for the Uffizi Regionale of Palermo by Signor Alfano.

† It is a "blind story," a mere gallery or arcade, not a clear-story.

The sculpture of the west front above the porch, instead, shows the bold vigorous forms that bear so much analogy with certain forms of "baroque" sculpture, of belated Romanesque. The magnificent wide-spanned window is of the Apulian type. It is noticeable that the fine faceted chevrons of the blind arcading are modelled on these of the east end, but the capitals of this arcading are evidently the work of the Giovanni Panittera of the inscription, and dating from 1240.

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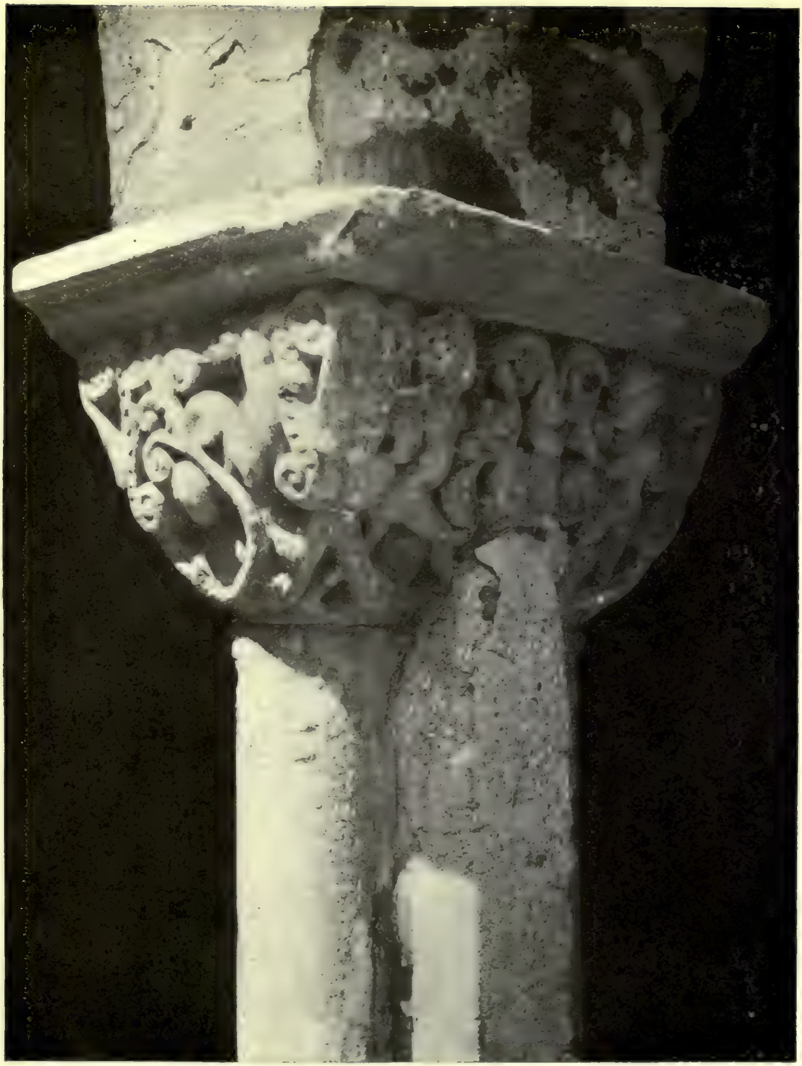
The cloister of Cefalù is assuredly one of the most picturesque in existence, nestling below the cathedral, with its ill-kept, rose-scented Sicilian garden, on the north side. It has been vaguely



Crupi, Taormina

CAPITAL, CLOISTER, CEFALÙ

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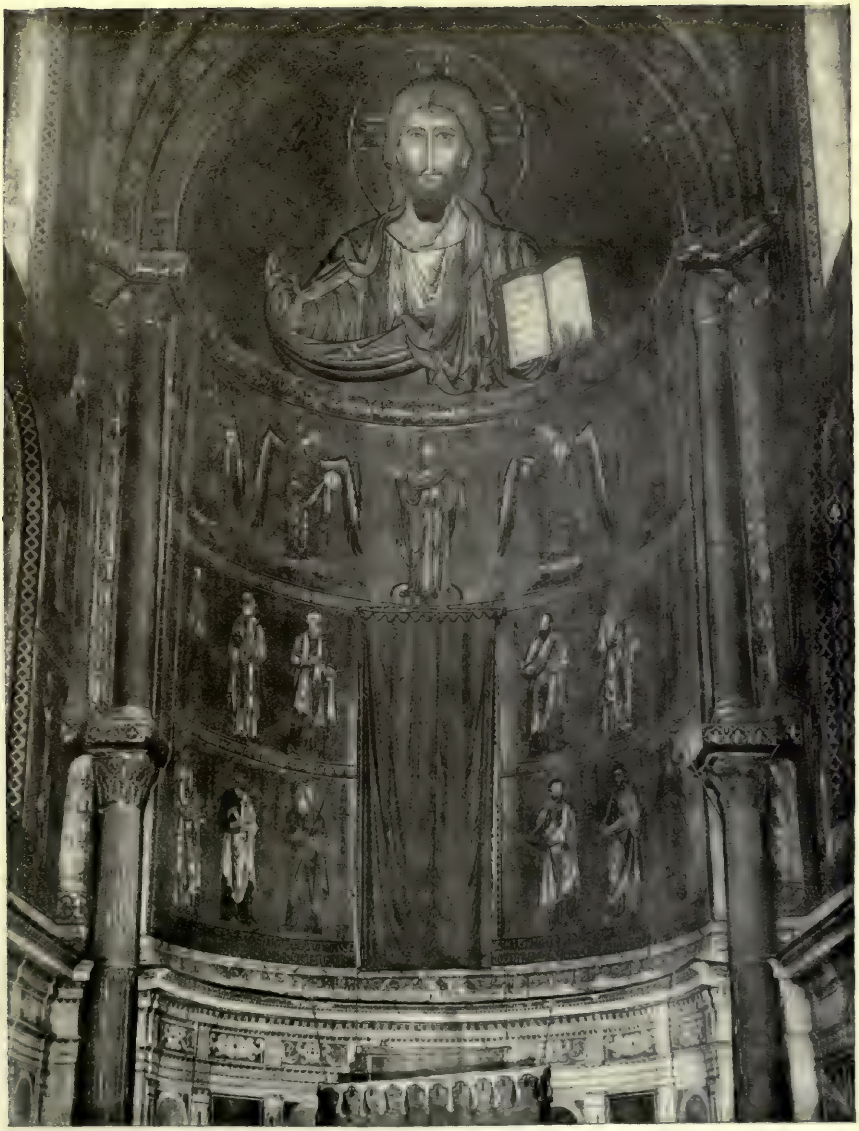
instanced as leading up to the cloister of Monreale, but a little careful study soon shows that it is one of the mediæval monuments that owe their present appearance of age mainly to romantic decay and local lack of skill. It is a composite cloister, impossible to date with accuracy. Among the Corinthian derivatives there is one of the "San Cataldo" type (*see* Pl. XXIII.) strayed there from Palermo somehow, and also decadent forms of this same cap, showing the break-up of this fine creation of a moment; there is one that evidently hails from Monreale, resembling a whole series of capitals at Monreale in the treatment of the acanthus, while another is a late variant of the type I have called "Sicilian." The figured caps and carved shafts are few and seemingly rude enough in their decay to suggest infantile art; but really not (all except one) proving earlier in type, when carefully examined, than the earliest and rudest ones of Monreale (*cf.* the two representations of jugglers, for instance). In one instance only does a rude capital at Cefalù (Pl. XXVII.) seem the prototype of a later one at Monreale (Pl. XXXIX.) in motive and decorative treatment. The famous capital with the delightful little scenes from Noah's Ark and the Deluge on it, is simply good Monreale work, now very much worn.

⁂

The mosaics still filling the tall apse and first bay to the east of the chancel of Cefalù must be mentioned apart from all archæological considerations, as they, or most of them, belong to the realm of pure beauty. Connoisseurs like M. Diehl assure us that they represent the very best Greek work of the time—unrestored. They certainly have a bloom and radiance of loveliness, unequalled by anything in Western Europe at the time, except some of the stained glass of the abbey of St. Denis. The majestic young figure of Christ, especially, gives a very high notion of the powers of expression of this school. Draped in a pale grey-blue mantle over a simple robe of gold streaked with a darker tone, with pink flesh-colour and pale chestnut hair and beard finely modulated, he looks down at you with a simple, pathetic, living, and searching gaze. The Madonna Orante below, too, is a pathetic youthful figure, full of grace and charm, in her well-filled Greek draperies. She wears a gown resembling a *chiton*, but with sleeves, of a pure, slaty grey with a mantle of a very dark red streaked with gold, with little gold crosses. Red predominates in the gorgeous Byzantine raiment of the adoring young angel to the right, blue in the raiment of the one to the left, set off by wings of many hues, splendid embroidery, and rich folds of a sumptuous Byzantine green. I dwell on these



Alinari APSE, CATHEDRAL, CEFALÙ *p.* 188

colour notes because the colour harmony of Cefalù is as noticeable and noteworthy, in a far richer diapason, as that of the best panels of the Martorana.

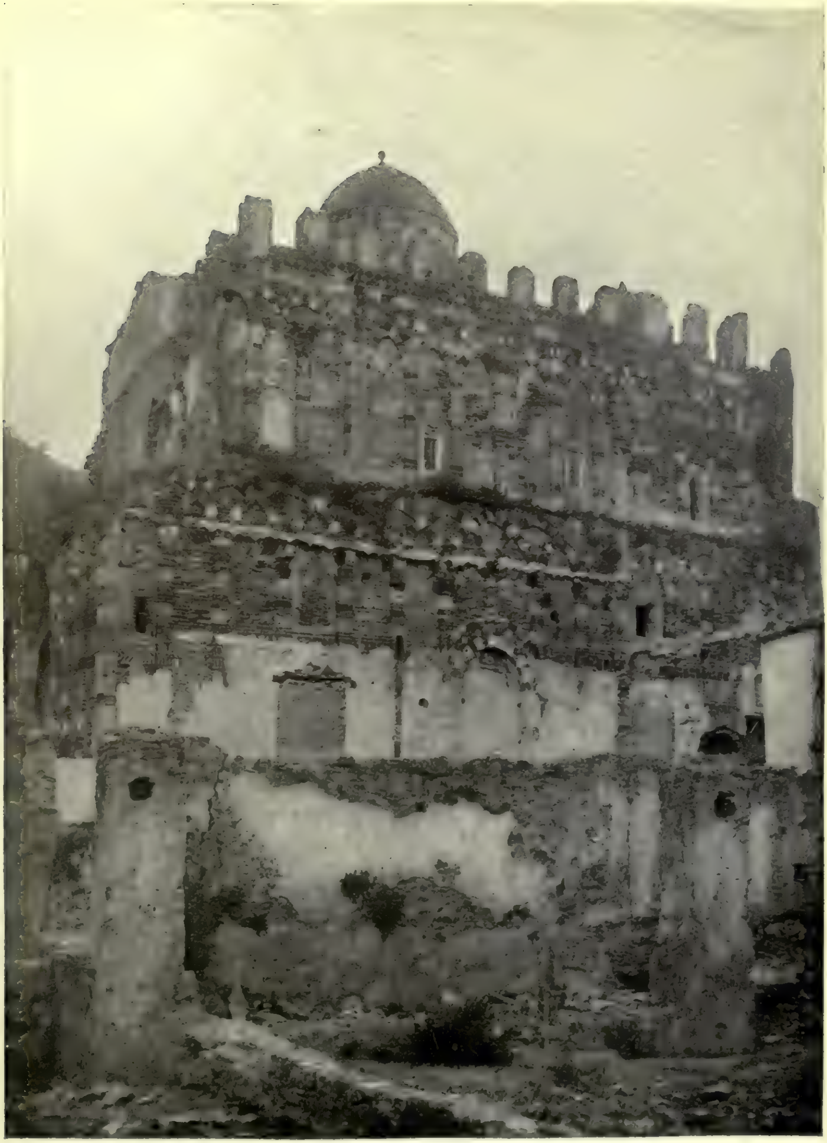
The representations of the twelve Apostles below have been dulled by restoration; there are still some fine figures, however, of grave middle-aged preachers, soberly robed in full blue with a red stripe or border, and a green mantle. Of the mosaics on the side walls representing prophets, young saints in splendid armour and old saints in solemn vestments, those in the lowest row with the Greek inscriptions are, according to M. Diehl, "assurément de la main des maîtres grecs qui travaillèrent pour Roger II." The topmost row of these figures is of later work, like the angels, but not very good work. We must be content with the pure beauty revealed in the apse in the midst of all these curious archæological problems.

⁂

Another interesting building calling earnestly for expert attention is the little-known abbey church of SS. Peter and Paul at Forza d'Agrò near Taormina.

It is situated on a spur of land jutting out into one of the *fiumare*, or wide shingle river-beds, winding inland up the valleys, that are such a distinctive feature of the beautiful landscape of the east coast, and are indeed the mule-tracks of the district. The *fiumara* d'Agrò is the widest of them all. As your carriage jolts along the ruts or crosses the runlets, you at first seem in a Turnerian world of deep sun-filled spaces, and distant river-side romance of capes and bays, with a few prominent buildings that look like towers, played round by light and shadow. One proves to be a *xenia*—as they still call the tall wide towers, with a wheel hung with buckets inside, for emptying water from the wells into the irrigation tanks—another a mill. White villages gleam on the tops of the little cone-shaped hills nestling in the embrace of the mountain valleys. There is a lot of traffic up and down stream, a woman walking rapidly with a large jar filled with something poised on her head, her hands busy knitting; women on muleback, peasants astride over huge piles of sacks on mules, jogging along patiently. By no means a desolate scene; yet with a certain desolate grandeur about it nevertheless, as the little figures come nearer, surrounded by light and air, against the grey of the shingle and the broad flat spaces.

The church lies astride on a spur of land at a bend of the river, just where the valley narrows and the character of the landscape changes: a



THE ABBEY CHURCH OF SS. PIETRO E PAOLO, FORZA D'AGRÒ

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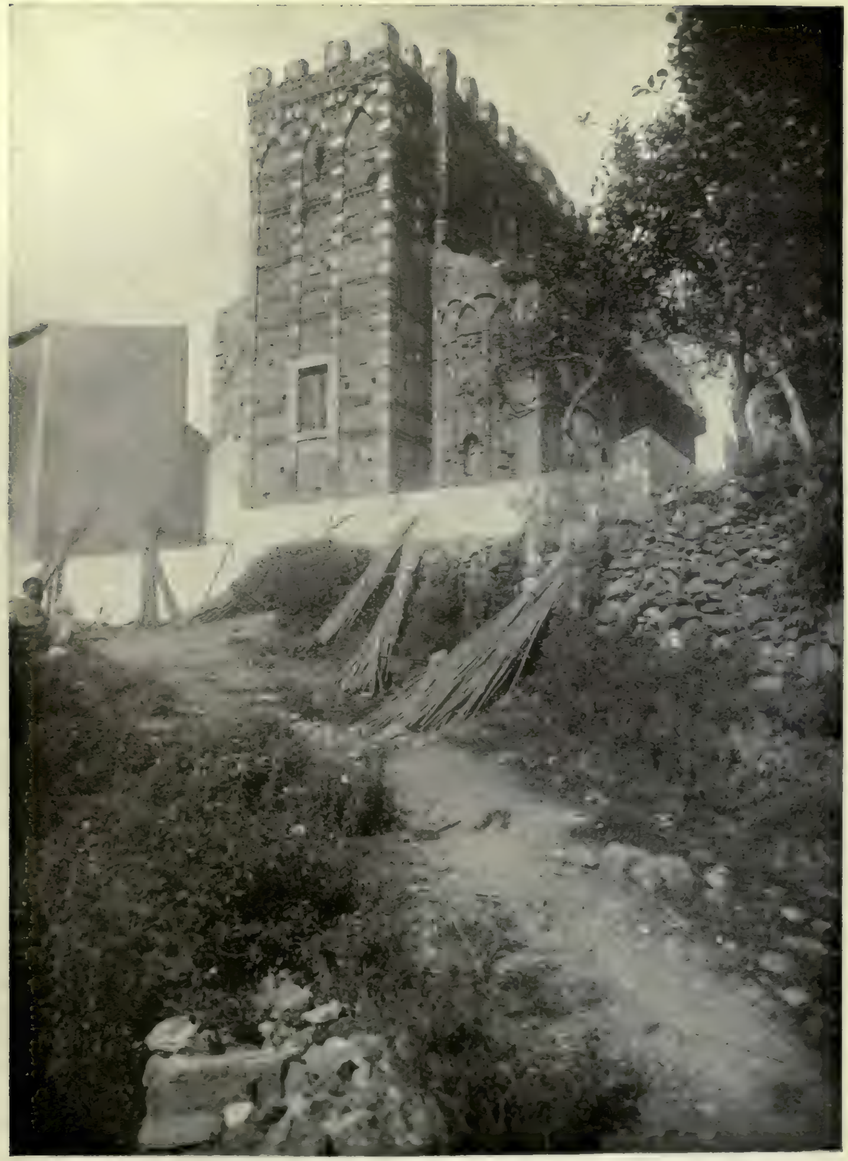


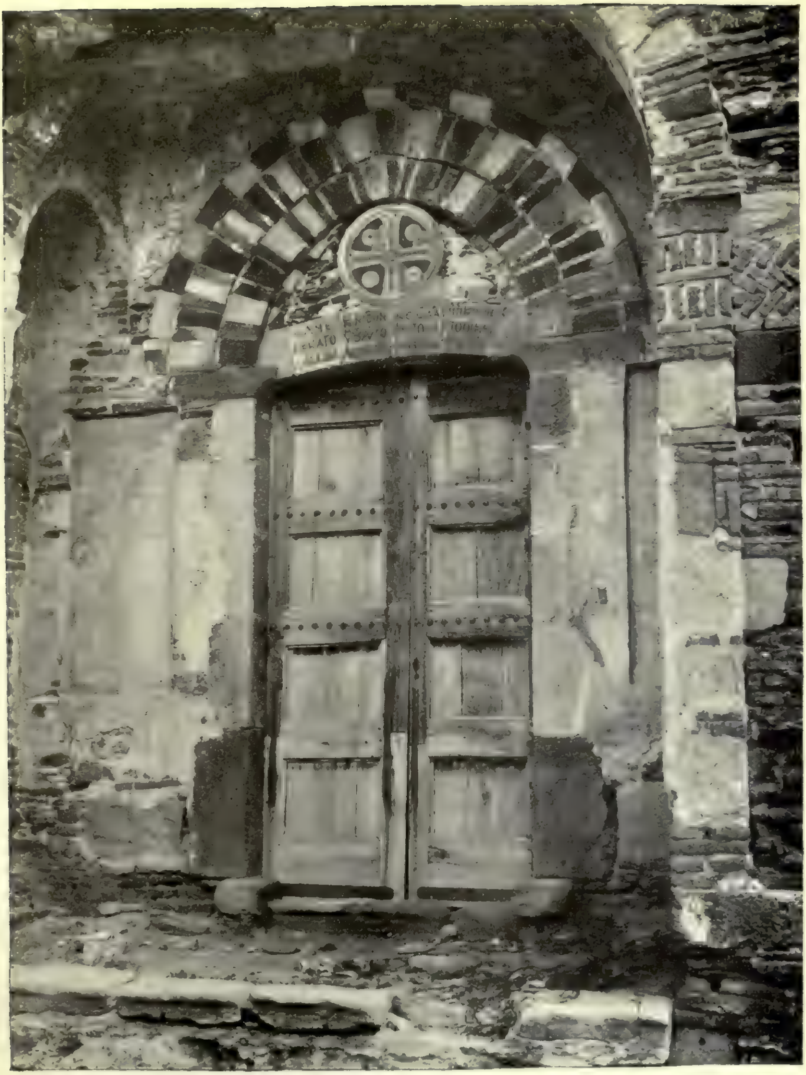
APSE OF THE CHURCH OF SS. PIETRO E PAOLO, FORZA D'AGRÒ

strange, tall, dark building, rising up high from a little group of sordid peasants' houses, surrounded by olive orchards and lemon groves, so tall and narrow as to suggest a transept left standing, rather than a complete church : looking stranger still as you come nearer and notice the two wavy domes of unequal height, so different from those in Palermo, the weird "outlandish" decoration of the pilaster strips and intersecting arches in white, black, and red, with a chequer pattern in red and black and a herring-bone in brick on the frieze and battlement. In 1906, when first seen by me, it was still picturesquely part and parcel of the poultry yard. It is now protected by a low wall, unnecessarily ugly, but useful.

It is built of large, dark bricks alternating in places so as to form a pattern in mosaic, with whitish stone and with dark lava. There is no trace of the elaborate Palermitan inlays.

It was a Basilian, *i.e.* Greek, monastery, richly endowed by Roger in 1115, as recorded in a deed still preserved. The present building dates from 1170–72. The upper part of the west front is now almost in ruins ; the porch below (Pl. XXXI.) is doubly remarkable as bearing the only inscription on twelfth-century Sicilian buildings, giving the name of an architect, and as speaking three architectural idioms, as it were. While the side niches suggest comparison with certain Saracenic monumental gateways, an inscription in Greek records the fact that it was built at the expense of Abbot Teosterictos in 1170–72 by Gerard the Frank. If this name really indicates a French architect and is not perchance a patronymic inherited from a French father or grandfather, this French master-mason had to accommodate himself to the requirements of the monks he worked for, not only in plan but also in construction—if this again was not forced upon him by the stubborn conservatism of local workmen. The only detail of the interior that suggests a northern influence are the capitals, which are of the fine transitional type of Corinthian derivatives, with fine sharply pointed leaves drawn together at the upper angles into energetic little spirals that are about to become Gothic crockets.

The plan shows a nave of three bays with a mere narrow passage (as in the Zisa chapel) replacing the deep solea of the Cappella Palatina type, at the east end, and three apses. There is a dome over this sanctuary supported on a kind of rough honeycomb bracketing built out from the sides (as the space is oblong) resembling, again, the system in use at the Zisa, though by no means so fine. The nave has been redecorated in the sixteenth century ; two of the three bays now have a ruinous but pretty little panelled ceiling. The tall dome on a round drum



DOORWAY OF THE CHURCH OF SS. PIETRO E PAOLO, FORZA D'AGRÒ

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over the second bay now apparently rests on elegant shallow sixteenth-century pendentives, and is entirely Renaissance in appearance, internally. Externally it resembles the (lower) dome over the east end, is slightly waved, without being of the melon type, and topped by a little ball. Is this a twelfth-century type of dome? Before leaving the subject of Siculo-Byzantine architecture, I should like to call the attention of students of Byzantine archæology to this curious and little-known waif.

⁂

Two other abbey churches of this eastern region show certain affinities with SS. Pietro e Paolo d'Agrò.

The ruined abbey church of the Sta. Maria della Valle (la Badiazza) up another river-bed near Messina, shows a somewhat similar system of bracketing (the dome has fallen in), combined with early Gothic forms in a very original way, with a curious four-square plan (photographed by Alinari).

The Rogerian church, now much altered, at San Filippo di Fragalà (or di Demenna), another Basilian monastery, greatly favoured by the first Norman rulers, has some vestiges of polychromatic decoration (visible in places where the plaster has fallen off, and drawn by A. Salinas), obtained by the use of lava, brick and wide interstices of white mortar. The original plan, according to Salinas, was that of a simple one-aisled basilica.

The little abbey church of Maniaci in the charming abbey buildings, once a Benedictine monastery, now the residence of the Duchy of Brontë, on the north slopes of Etna, is interesting from the opposite point of view. Uninfluenced by either admiration of the great mother church at Monreale, or by the natural predilection of this region for the decorative use of lava, the monks have chosen to build a plain little church with a timber roof supported on four tall pillars of masonry, round or octagon, and to give it a pleasant little "transitional" doorway that might hail from almost anywhere, with plain graceful mouldings outlining the pointed arch and a continuous impost band of carved figure-subjects over a lower band of leaves, pretty and fanciful, but not very important, which do not recall, either in treatment or conception, any of the well-defined styles or groups represented at Monreale.

CHAPTER IX

CISTERCIAN CHURCHES: THE CATHEDRAL OF PALERMO

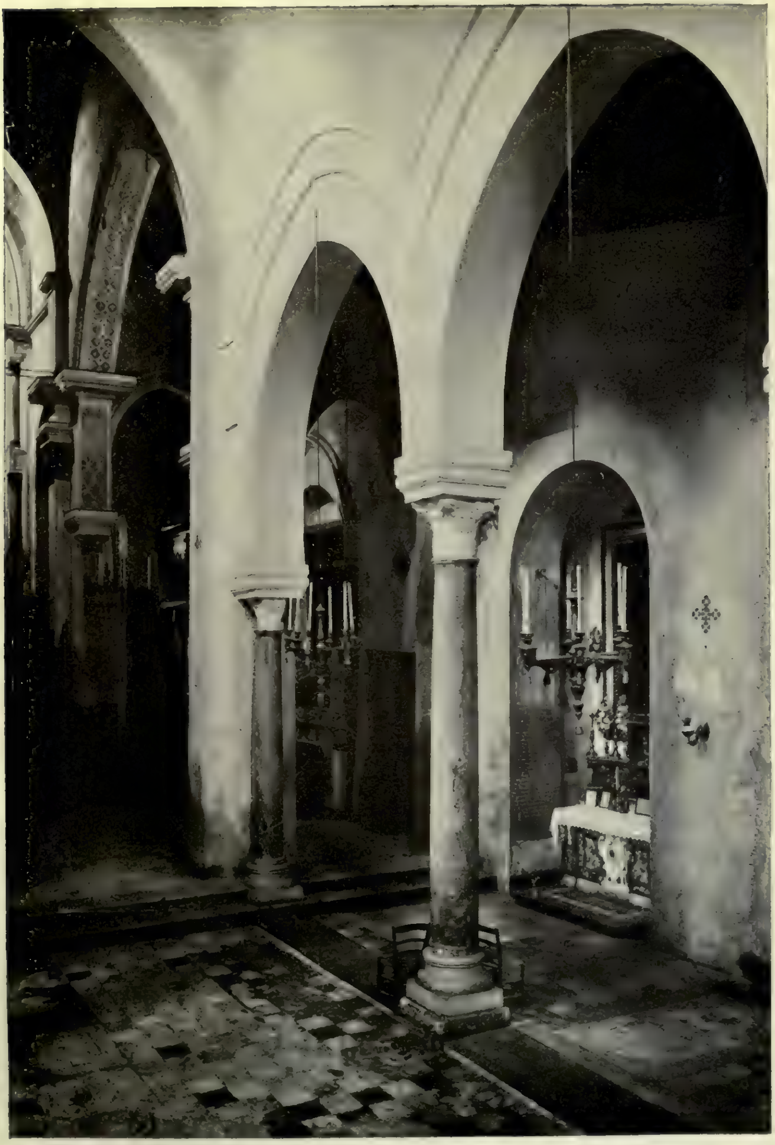
As the twelfth century wore on the Latin clergy were busy building churches and founding monasteries, several of them peopled by the Cistercians, who played such an important part everywhere as propagators of Transalpine (French) architectural ideas. As far as we now can tell their influence in Sicily was not considerable. Their coming is noteworthy. The first Cistercians were called in by King Roger in 1140, when he saw fit to make friends with his quondam political opponent, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. There is a letter from the saint to the king, thanking him enthusiastically for the reception accorded his monks, "sending to meet them with bread, bringing them in out of the cold, settling them on noble ground where they could enjoy the fruits of the earth and obtain honey (also *oleum de saxo durissimo*), butter from the herds, and milk from sheep, and drink the purest wine made from blood-red grapes."

There are no traces left of their first church and monastery, so we are at a loss to know if their missionary zeal as builders got the better of the stubborn Sicilian insularity.

About 1150 the wealthy Protonotary and later Chancellor Matteo d'Ajello had a church and monastery built for them, dedicated to the SS. Trinità. It was also greatly enriched by his family. In 1194 they were turned out by Henry VI. to make room for some of his Germans, the Knights of the Teutonic Order; the church has since been known as the Magione.

In plan this church of the Magione is a Romanesque basilica, with a nave and two side aisles, a real if somewhat stunted transept, and three apses. There is no dome; the pointed arches might be Northern Transitional, but are more probably Southern Saracenesque like those at Cefalù. The general impression is still Palermitan, Arabo-Norman in the widest sense; especially if one first happens in towards nightfall and sees the women of the quarter kneeling in prayer in the twilight of the nave, before a side altar with many candles, the black shawls that have now replaced the old voluminous cloth mantles drawn over their heads and relieved against the whitewash of the nave.

The Magione is a large church much frequented



CHURCH OF THE MAGIONE, PALERMO

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by the poor of the surrounding picturesque quarter of the Kalsa. It must once have been a church of some magnificence, to judge by the fine display of little columns set into the angles of the three tall apses, now woefully restored in meretricious sham Gothic. There are twenty-four columns in all; six in each of the side apses, twelve in the central apse, which is recessed once, as in the Cappella Palatina.

If we now consult the capitals—those sensitive features showing the forces at work within—for evidence as to the style of the original, which is now whitewashed or redecorated, we shall find that they represent the usual Palermitan medley of classical (bought or stolen) Byzantesque, and a modification of the type that I have called Sicilian—one only seems to suggest a Northern origin.

The soberly painted dark timber roof is decorated with narrow zigzag borders, like those one sees in Tuscany, and the coats of arms of the Teutonic Knights, enclosed in the panels of the Saracenic locked star pattern.

The Magione is most picturesquely inaccessible. The only part now visible of the old exterior is the apse, jutting out above an old street near a large irregular open space, unpaved and sloping, surrounded by shabby weather-stained houses, clothes-lines zigzagging in front of them, with their modulated whites and bright spots of lemon-colour, pale blue and ruby-red ; pepper-trees flecking the pavement with quivering light and shadow ; bits of garden visible behind tall iron railings ; shells and apses of old churches ; stone pines perched up high among broken masses of deep shadow ; all combining with the broad flood of unbroken sunlight to form a picture recalling lithographs of the Romantic School, when the fascination and significance of the Middle Ages first began to make itself felt to modern minds. There are many such "artist's bits" in Palermo in old quarters and odd corners. The little old cloister of the Magione is one of them ; it is only visible from the windows of the neighbouring flats—a tiny courtyard, in 1908 still thickly planted with fruit trees, in due season laden with lemons and mandarines, the surrounding wall charmingly patterned with pointed niches having simple graceful mouldings, rather Northern in character. The plaster is now stripped from one pair of twin capitals, showing a pretty bell-shaped core with the clinging acanthus (*cf.* Monreale) of 1180–90.

The exterior of the church of Sto. Spirito, founded in 1180–82 for a monastery of Cistercians by Archbishop Walter of the Mill, and restored in 1882, may be said to be full of interest, but somewhat lacking in charm, more a mongrel in architecture, with some fine puzzling "points," than a hybrid full of delicate perfume. The exterior has two features of interest: the large lantern or raised roof over the crossing, which has replaced the dome, and some decorative wall arcading patterned with alternate stones of lava and tufa, in the effective Byzantine manner, round the windows, while the apse has an arcade of interlaced arches, running round the (Eastern) corduroy work framing the windows, which might be a Northern feature, but is also very much of an Eastern feature. The blend of elements in Sicilian architecture is not quite so easily determined as some writers seem to think. The game of "Attribution" is often as foolish a pastime in architecture as it is in painting.

The interior—another Romanesque basilica with a slightly elongated choir—has a most perplexing feature, not yet satisfactorily explained, in the tall round piers of rough lava masonry, seemingly Norman, and strikingly so, yet supporting fine Saracenic pointed arches and a simple Southern wall without any Norman features.

At a recent restoration of the timber roof some thirteenth-century paintings were discovered and partly restored, partly copied in water-colours. Chiefly Gothic in style, with a very fine floriated scroll on one beam, they still show in the admixture of Arabic star motives the survival of the Saracenic tradition which will crop up again later.

Another Cistercian monastery was founded by Walter of the Mill on the city wall behind the cathedral. The little chapel, now known as S. Cristina la Vetere, is still standing, with the exception of the chancel (which is enlarged and later), a tiny square with four masonry pillars supporting an interesting vault, seemingly very Cistercian in its austere simplicity, now that all traces of decoration have disappeared.

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In estimating the growing influence of the Latin clergy due weight should be given to the important and energetic personality of the English bishop and statesman, Walter of the Mill (Gualtiero Offamiglio). Unfortunately but little remains in its original state of his great work, the cathedral of Palermo.

The cathedral where Roger was crowned king with incredible pomp in 1130 still seems to have been, at least partly, the ancient Latin basilica converted into a mosque by the Mohammedans. The interior must have been very splendid to judge by the description by Edrisi (p. 52), who unfortunately does not say if all this splendour was due to King Roger, or inherited from the Arabs.

Otherwise we know very little about it, beyond the fact that it had a porch and two chapels (added by the Normans?), to the north and south respectively. To these chapels Roger added porches (westward) in 1129–30. In the north chapel, later known as Sta. Maria l'Incoronata, and partly built out over the old city walls (*cf.* Pl. LIX. p. 272), the Sicilian kings were crowned, showing themselves, afterwards, from the *loggia* or porch outside to the people collected below. The walls of this chapel are still *in situ ;* the interior was fairly representative until 1860, when it was ruined by fire. The old porch became a *loggia* for the nobility in the fifteenth century, when the chapel was no longer used for coronations, and has been rebuilt at least twice. Some mediæval columns of white marble have been used up, among others, for this rebuilding. Two of the capitals show heavy forms of Romanesque Corinthian that may possibly have belonged to the Rogerian porch. Others, evidently dating from Archbishop Walter's time, are Transitional or early Gothic, resembling those at Agrò, with simple leaves at the angles, sharply drawn together into a ball at the top, a form rare in Palermo, and of interest to archæologists, as are certain bones and knuckles to zoologists, as possibly indicating a (Northern) type of building that has disappeared. It is generally the most characteristic buildings that have survived, it is true, but we must always remember that they were not the only ones in those days when art was alive, and *lo plano* in front of the cathedral, the whole large area within the walls of the neighbouring citadel, the whole of Palermo almost, were strewn thickly with monasteries and churches, Latin or Greek, as shown in records of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

To return to the cathedral and the little chapel on the south side known as la Maddalena. It was used as the burial-place of the Norman kings until 1182, when Walter of the Mill obtained permission of the then King William II. to raze it to the ground in order to make room for the enlargement of the cathedral. The "Incoronata" was left standing, but separated from the cathedral by a street or alley. The new cathedral was thus moved more to the south.

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Very little now remains of Archbishop Walter's building beyond the general outline of the plan and some portions of the south front and east end. It was entirely renovated by the Neapolitan architect, B. Fuga, in 1782-1802, and nothing now remains of the old church in the cold and stately interior except the superb classical columns of granite and the tombs of the kings, by Fuga relegated from the

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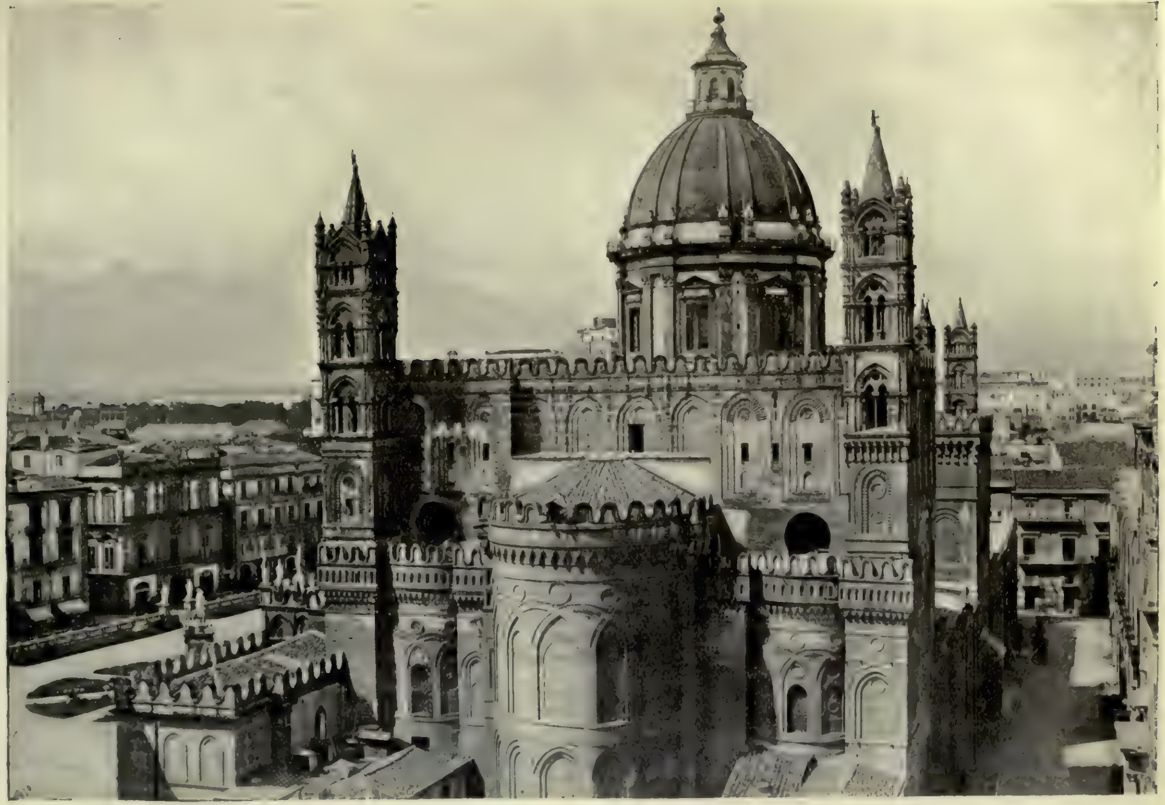

Incorpora, Palermo

THE CATHEDRAL OF PALERMO

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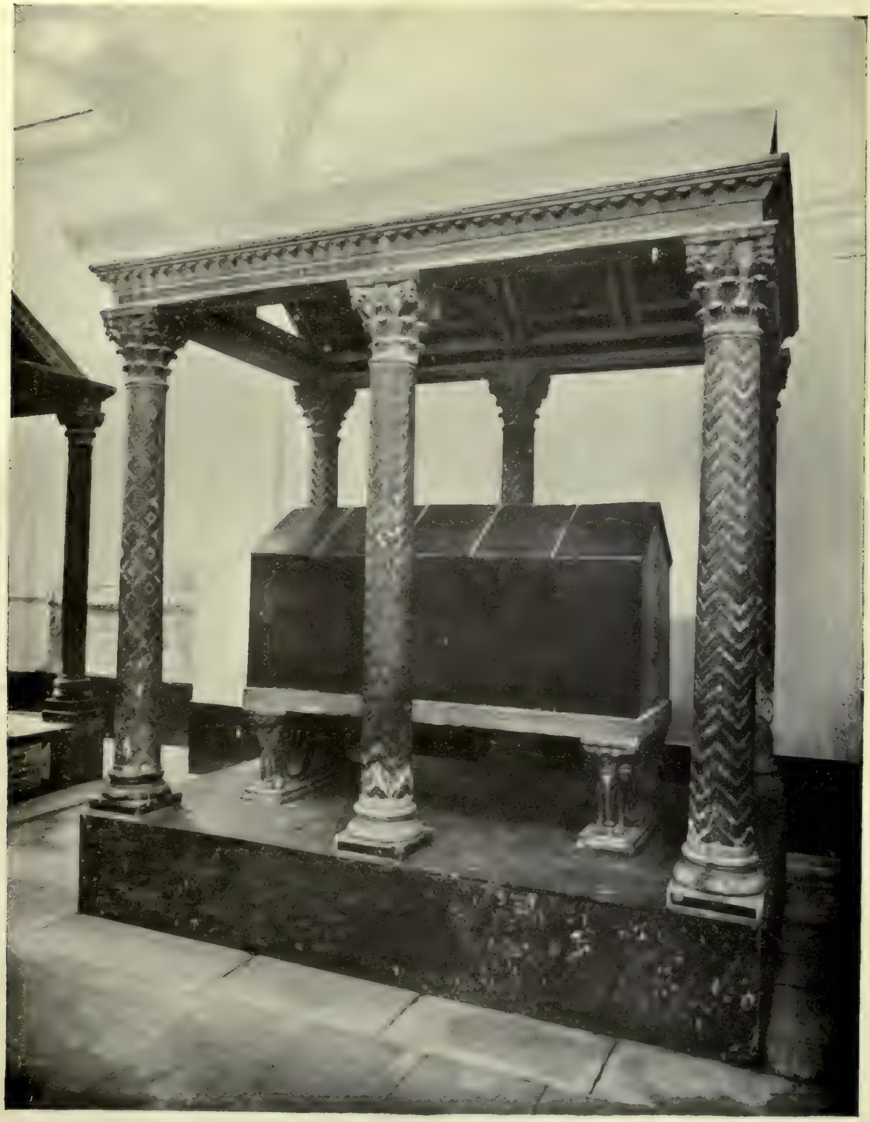
east end to a cramped position in two dark chapels near the entrance. The interesting and curious apse evidently also, to judge by the capitals, dates from the twelfth century.

There is most of the old work remaining on the exterior of the apse, which is ornamented with bold, flat, eminently decorative, interlacing arches, enlivened by borders and medallions of Siculo-Saracenesque inlays in lava, much freer and more varied in treatment than the simple stars round the windows of the Martorana tower. But this east end has been restored, and we cannot quite trust these pert, frisking little lions and sprawling flowers. The lower portions of the two towers flanking the apse, the outer south wall of the nave are also twelfth century. All the rest is later: the west front and towers, fourteenth century, after the belfry had fallen down in 1340, doing much damage to the old front; the magnificent and irresistible southern porch, full of Spanish exuberance, fifteenth century; other additions later still, till we come to Fuga's unfortunate and unsightly cupola. (The upper part of the massive belfry has been rebuilt in the nineteenth century.)

Yet all this mingles so effectively with the exotic garden and baroque statues in front, in itself so exotic, with the golden fretwork of stone embroidery, the long lines of flame-like battlements, the fantastic, airy, open-work towers, that it is a pure joy to the artist—in some moods.

It is also typically Palermitan. Sicily did not produce art of great expressive or creative importance after the twelfth century; but in the carved Spanish embroidery of this porch, in the semi-"Moorish" scroll-work over some windows and gateways of Syracuse, in the architectural forms assimilated from the mainland, shown in the well-known Franciscan churches of S. Francesco d'Assisi and Sant' Agostino, in the ornamental forms, rich, sprightly and gay, there developed, or running riot along the string-course of certain sombre-hued palaces in side streets in Palermo, there are racial preferences shown, there is an insular originality, an impress of temperamental rhythm, full of interest to the student and charm to the artist.

A word must be said here about the fine porphyry tombs in the cathedral, renowned for the skill with which the hard material has been treated. Were the craftsmen Sicilians? To one who has come to believe in the Apulian origin of the short-lived Sicilian blossoming of sculpture, as the only reasonably historic and possible one, the Apulian character of the crouched slaves carved in white marble, supporting the plain coffin of Roger II., is very noticeable. But whoever the



TOMB OF ROGER II., CATHEDRAL, PALERMO

Alinari

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artists, these tombs are superb, full of impressive grandeur. The tombs of the two Emperors, Henry VI. and his son Frederic II., have plain porphyry canopies; the tombs of Roger II. and his daughter Constance, canopies of white marble, vividly and finely contrasting in colour with the deep red of the porphyry; with inlays of parcel mosaic, and fine interesting capitals, recalling some found scattered about Ravello.

CHAPTER X

THE CATHEDRAL AND CLOISTER OF MONREALE: THE SICILIAN WORKSHOP OF FIGURE SCULPTURE

THE cathedral of Monreale was built in connection with a Benedictine monastery, founded by William II., which soon became his favourite creation. The abbey church was made the cathedral of the town, the rank and insignia of a bishop were procured from the Pope for the abbot, much to the disgust, it is said, of Archbishop Walter of Palermo; no expense was spared in building, adorning or endowment.

The valuable "Tabulario" or "Catalogue raisonné" of the Cartulary of Monreale published by Professor Garufi, offers us highly interesting glimpses of the social and economic background of one of these great mediæval establishments. The official deed of endowment is dated 1176; a papal bull of 1174, however, refers to the church as already a-building. It is a most elaborate document, with several original signatures; among these Archbishop Walter of the Mill's, bold, scrolly and firm.

This deed, which once had a beautiful golden seal, was presented with much pomp (offered on the altar) on the day of Assumption, the great festival of the abbey. The monastery was liberally endowed with possessions in land, several feudal castles with all their holdings, dues and services; the village of Bulchar with all appertaining to it, the mill below the monastery; two churches with their vineyards, cane-fields and villages; a mill for grinding the sugar-cane, houses in Palermo, the tunny-fishery of the island of Fimi; a church in Messina; churches in Calabria; in Apulia (it should be noted, by the student of sculpture), a whole city, Bitetto, *cum omnibus justitiis;* the right to fish with five boats in the harbour of Palermo, and certain rights of pasturage. Of a truth the prior of a monastery such as Monreale must not be a mediæval dreamer, a mere learned clerk. With all these widely scattered possessions it is not surprising to find, also, deeds guaranteeing the abbot hospitality with food for himself and his monks, and barley for their horses, from obedient monasteries, or a deed granting freedom from toll when passing the Straits of Messina, to all the monks, servants and horses (or mules) of the monastery and of the various obediences. The mediæval folk, from emperors to monks and minstrels, were great travellers, always on the road or rather bridle-path.

After 1195, and during the long minority of Frederic II., there is a period of disorder and decadence. The Emperor Henry VI. issues a deed taking the monastery under his protection ; severe edicts are issued later, ordering the restitution of runaway serfs, or of lands wrongfully laid hands on. We even find papal bulls exhorting the monks to keep the peace, or bishops to do as they are told. In 1211, however, Frederic II. proceeds to set his Sicilian house in order. He seems to have succeeded by 1220. These dates, again, are of some importance for the history of art.

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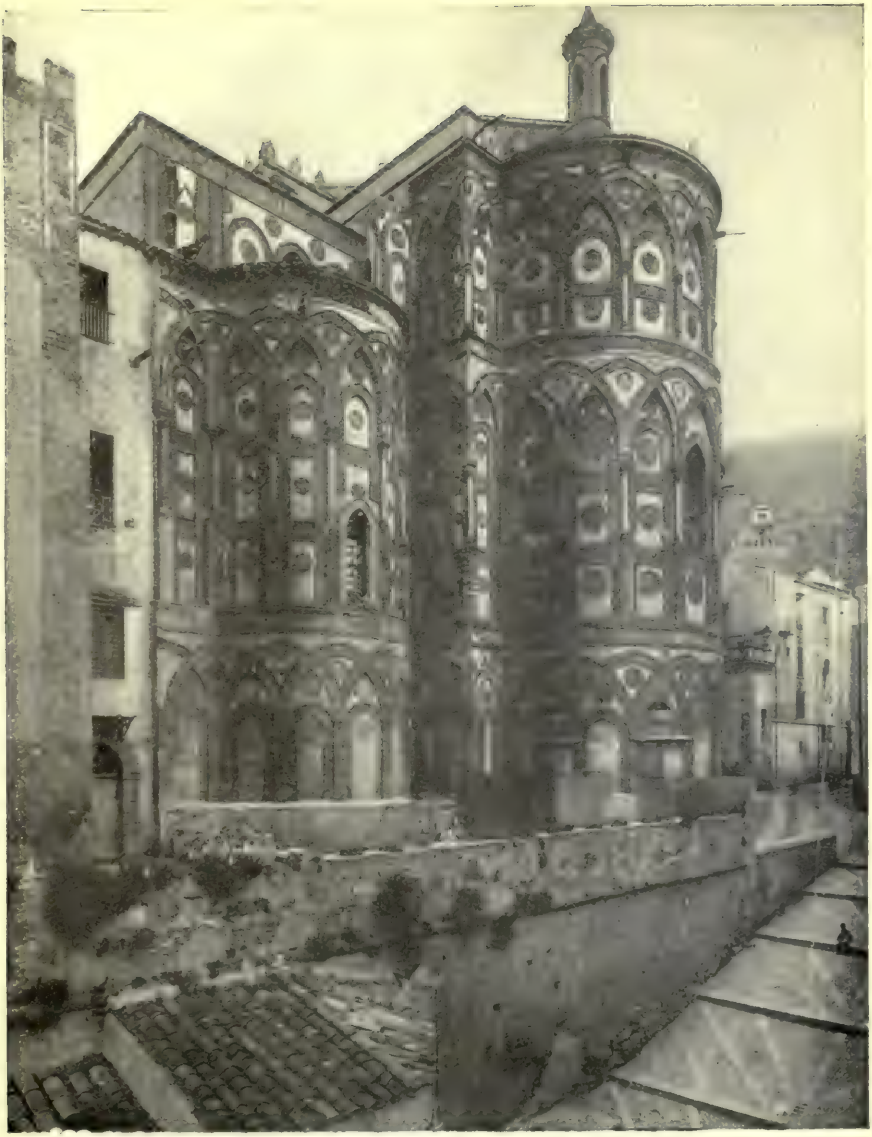
The Cathedral of Monreale belongs, with Cefalù and Palermo, to the group that has been claimed as showing Norman influence on the strength of the two sturdy western towers. Undeniably Latin, these towers are not, however, incorporated with the building as they are in Normandy. Internally there is no transept, the east end still retains the Greek elongated sanctuary with the solea, though the dome over it has been replaced by a timber roof. It is significant, also, that the mosaics correspond to the iconographical conceptions of the Greek liturgy.

The exterior of the apse is all a rich embroidery



EXTERIOR OF APSE, CATHEDRAL, MONREALE

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of precious shafts, interlacing arches and lava inlays, toned golden by time ; a little over-ripe and profuse, but very Eastern and effective in the Sicilian sunlight, when seen from below, rising up among the clustered houses of the hill-side town surrounded by the glorious mountain ranges.

This decoration is repeated round the windows of the clerestory and thewest front. The north porch is Renaissance, with some old capitals. The west door has a very fine carved doorway which might be called Sicilian in style if it were not the only one in existence—now ; it is not impossible that the Cathedral of Palermo had a similar doorway. There is a certain affinity with Cefalù, not in style but in the general lines of the arrangement ; a pentagonal gable, enclosing one of the usual round-arched doorways, framed in flat bands of carved ornament, without a tympanum, with a fine transverse band of capitals between the round arches and the corresponding uprights. A similar arrangement, more elaborate, still prevails on the doorway of Sant' Agostino (late thirteenth century). At Sant' Agostino, as at Monreale, also, the flat bands in low relief alternate most effectively with bands of mosaic ; those at Monreale executed in gorgeous parcel mosaic, richer and more varied in colour than those in use in the panelling within. Among the ornamental motives of the carved bands there is the chevron or zigzag which has been eagerly seized upon as the sign-manual of Norman influence. But this again might just as well hail from the East, and is in use during the Romanesque period in other places in Italy, where no Norman influence is suspected; for instance, on the west front of San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno in Pisa.

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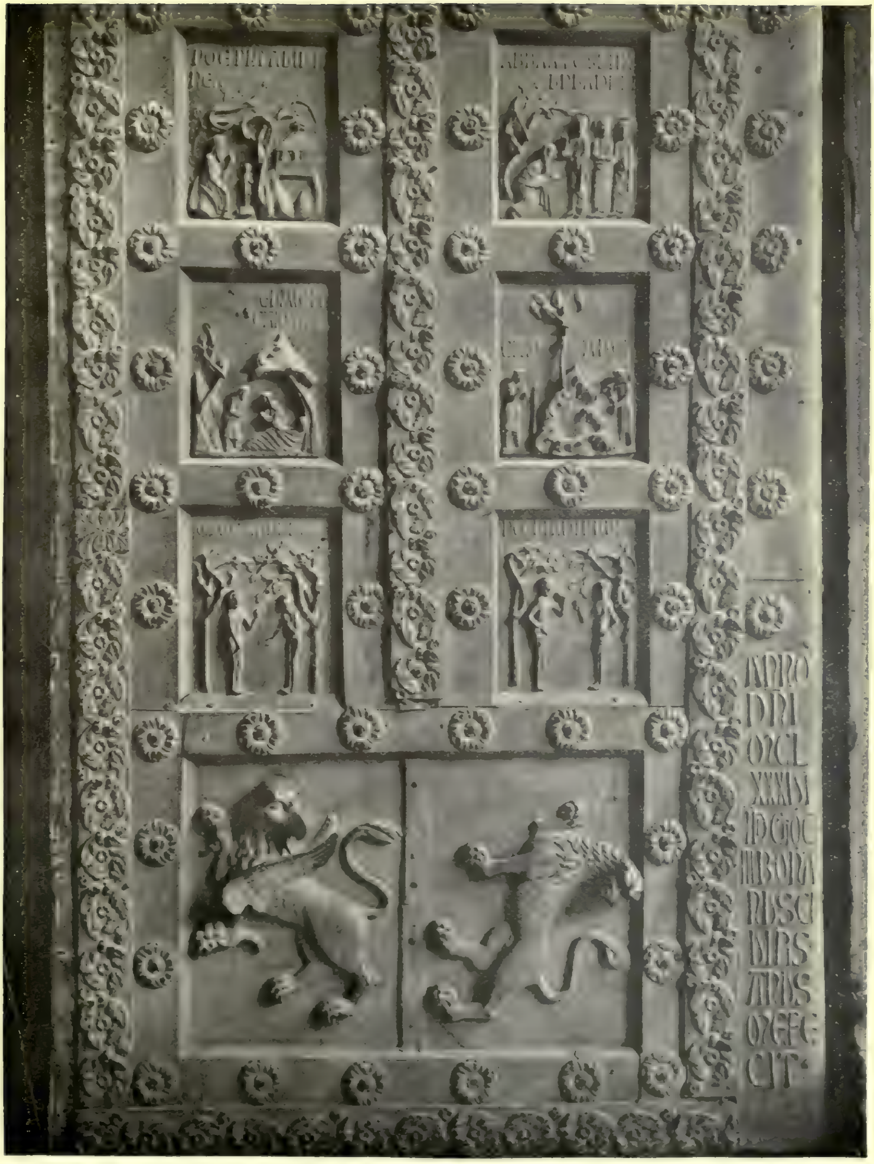
The cathedral was enriched, according to the fashion prevailing when funds were forthcoming, with costly bronze doors; those of the west or main entrance by Bonnano of Pisa, dated 1186, those of the north doorway by Barisano of Trani. These two magnificent pairs of doors are to us doubly remarkable as representing, side by side, the two great forces in all art endeavour, not then yet fused in monumental sculpture; the two curious innate human instincts that together have produced what we call art: the deep instinctive desire for expression, so potent in the men of the Middle Ages, with their intensity of feeling, their childlike minds, filled with marvel and mystery, and thronged with living conceptions that sought for utterance; and the keen instinctive childlike ioy in representation, in craftsmanship, in art for art's sake, in a wholesome, irresponsible, whole-hearted way.



PART OF BRONZE DOOR BY BONNANO OF PISA, CATHEDRAL, MONREALE

Alinari

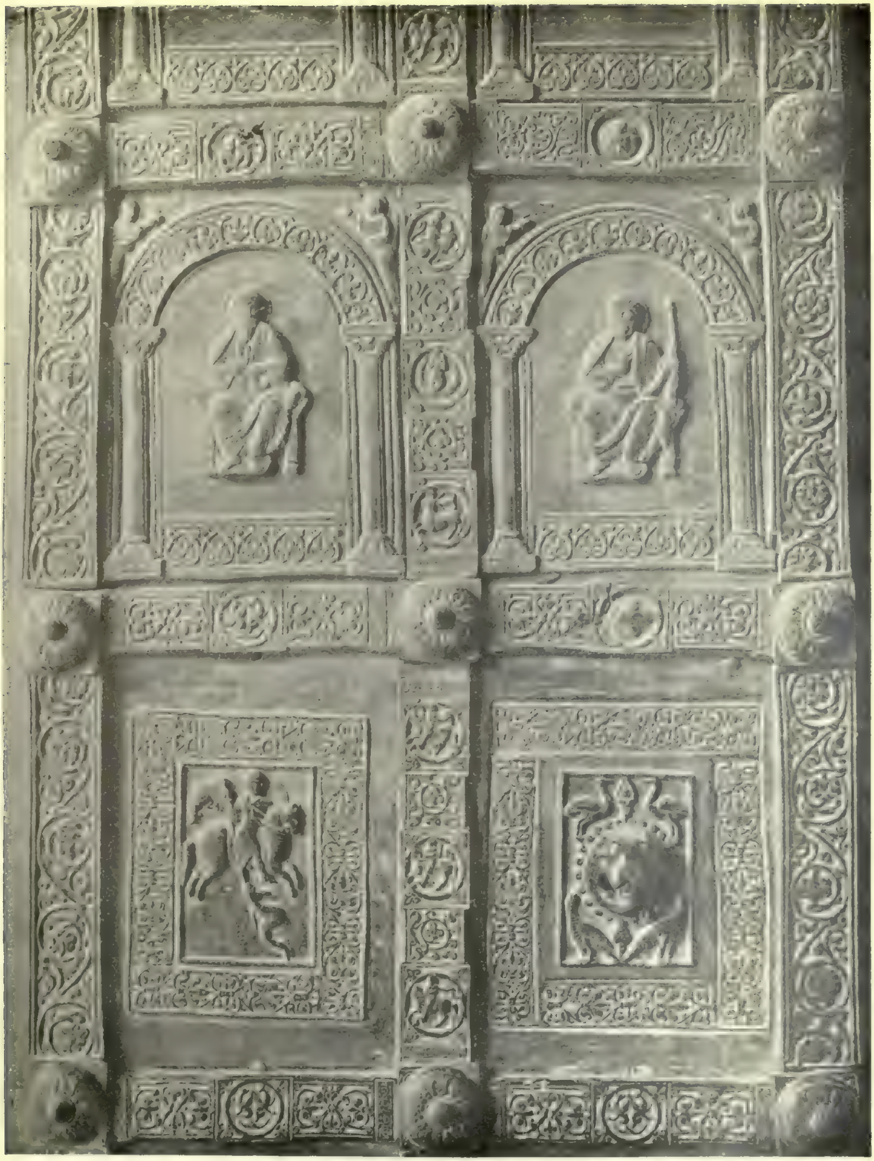
To us the great west doors by Bonnano of Pisa appeal mainly by virtue of the strong narrative and dramatic instinct there revealed, struggling with inadequate means of expression, while yet showing, as the work of these dramatic sculptors often does, an innate perception of effective composition. Yet the work of the Tuscan master, set up in 1180 in his own native cathedral, must have appealed to contemporaries as "masterly" in a way that now escapes us, since he was called in to execute the main doors of this great Sicilian cathedral, for which no expense was spared.

Entirely different is the work of Barisano. He is preoccupied with style, with the medium of expression, with pleasing comeliness of pattern. He has evidently found inspiration and stimulus in Early Christian or sea-borne Byzantine ivories (diptycha, caskets or pyxes), and has been content to translate—without any desire to create, or find expression for inner visions haunting him—their representations of the Madonna, the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and Christ in Majesty; to borrow models from them for his dignified seated saints and dignitaries, his spirited horsemen and archers, and his delightful scrolls—while yet rendering all this imitation inimitable in verve by his own exquisite personal masterly sense of style. There are similar doors by him at Trani and Ravello, cast in the same moulds and rearranged. Superb nail-heads, used for riveting the bronze plaques to stout wooden boards, and lion's masks in fine relief contribute to give decorative distinction to all these doors.

* * *

The interior of Monreale is one of the most impressive churches of Western Christendom, in spite of partial restoration and refurbishing after a fire in 1811, and the floods of silvery light, surely not in the original intention. (Indeed we know from a record of repairs in 1540 that they were originally of lead, cast in sheets and pierced in patterns.) There are thus no twilit suggestions, none of these subtle whispers from the soul of the past, from craftsmen, worshippers, thinkers and dreamers, which only come where the script has been left untouched.

Yet the mighty harmony of parts makes itself felt withal, the fitting splendour of floor and walls all sheeted with marble ; the joyous breadth of this mighty wave of superb granite columns, the solemn grandeur of the deep choir beyond, rising tall and restful ; broken through with arches, giving variety and shadow to the golden gleam of the mosaics, the well-balanced proportions of all the upper spaces. The Mosaics spreading aloft over the



PART OF BRONZE DOOR BY BARISANO OF TROJA, CATHEDRAL, MONREALE

Alinari

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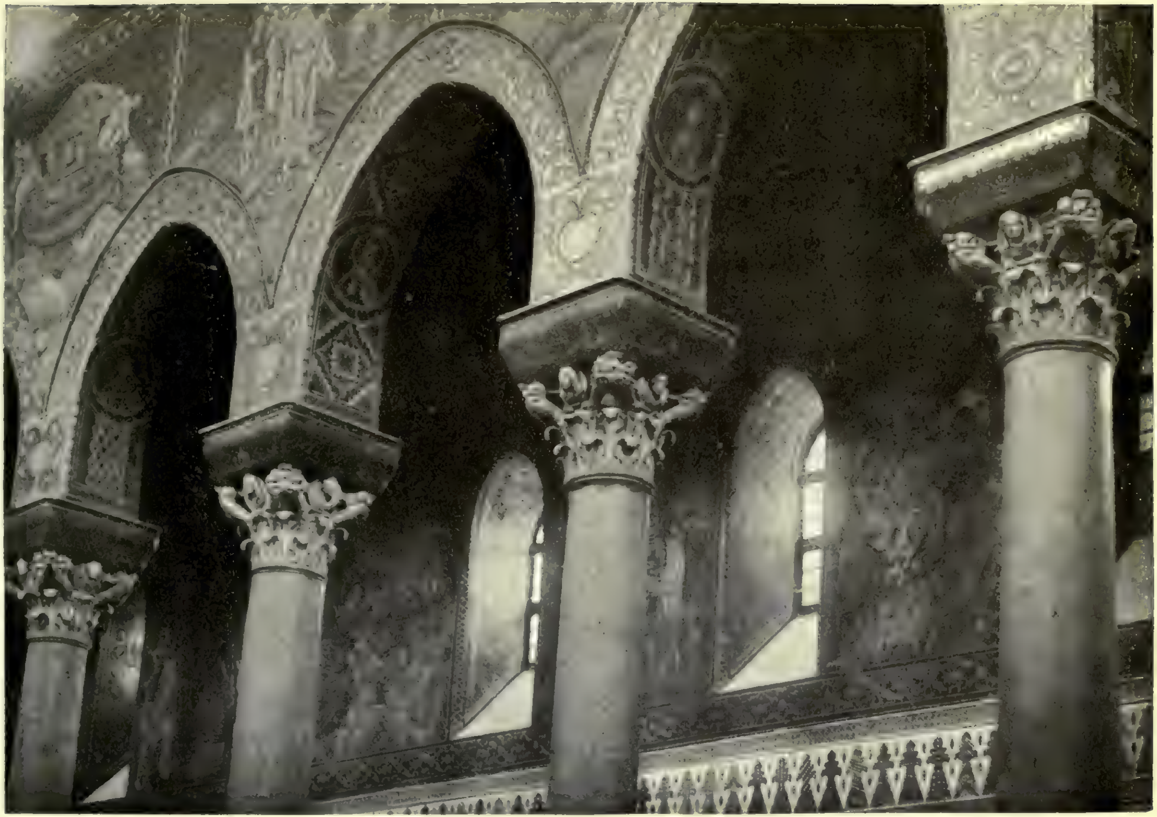
immense wall-surfaces are a revelation alike to craftsman and student of the inestimable advantage of a firm, well-grounded artistic and iconographical tradition. Originally evidently the work of Sicilian pupils of the first Greek masters, they have been restored at various periods again and again, and cannot bear comparison with Cefalù, or the unspoiled early ones of the Cappella Palatina. There is no thrill here, no mystic direct message from craftsman to beholder, no lingering afterglow of radiant Greek beauty. Yet all is appropriate, effective and impressive even now and must have been far more impressive then, when the original work was still untouched—and these "stories" meant something to those who saw them, when the light was subdued and the nave full of worshippers.

The iconographical scheme followed corresponds to that of the Cappella Palatina, with one important difference. There being no dome, the whole beautiful central conception of Christ Pantocrater with attendant figures over the Sanctuary has disappeared. Some of these figures have found a place in the tall apse instead, as at Cefalù. At Cefalù, however, the Virgin is still *Orante* (adoring), here she is enthroned ; below her Son, it is true, yet seemingly the centre of a court of Angels and Archangels, Prophets and Evangelists.

It is interesting, also, to compare the difference in conception and execution between the superbly simple Dedication and Coronation panels of the Martorana (Pl. III. p. 34), full of pious humility, and the elaborate representations of the same subjects at Monreale, with their impress of self-conscious courtly etiquette (Pl. IV. p. 41).

On the other hand, the panels with "histories" from the Old Testament, on the walls of the nave, seem (as far as one can judge from below, from much restored and somewhat plausible work) designed and executed with more breadth and freedom of conception and handling than the corresponding but more cramped and crowded panels in the Cappella Palatina ; and withal with a certain love of sumptuous accessories that stands the social historian in good stead. The study of ornament initiated at the Martorana may also be continued with pleasure and profit here, as in all great *ensembles* of decorative art which is still traditional and not yet effete.

The Monreale workshop in mosaic was still in existence in the sixteenth century. On the walls of the "transepts" there are still some mosaics, very good of their kind, executed early in that century by a highly gifted artist, Maestro Pietro di Maso Oddo. Both church and cloister were then, we are told "in a piteous condition, so that



Crupi, Taormina

ARCADE OF NAVE, CATHEDRAL, MONREALE

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the rain came in through the roof" (in the nave), and were put thoroughly into repair.

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The importance of Monreale for the study of Southern Italian sculpture is well known. There is, however, as the observant student cannot fail to notice, none of this in the interior of the great cathedral ; none of those sculptured fonts, pulpits, or chancel screens that the reawakening sculptural instinct in other regions seized hold of for their carved representations of Biblical scenes ; nor one of those Paschal candlesticks, one of which has found its way to the Cappella Palatina, that are found in all the other great churches on the neighbouring mainland. There are not even any traces of them broken up and put away, as is the case with so much of the superb Romanesque sculpture of Lombardy, in side chapels or aisles or even the sheds of the Opera, when the Mediæval church was overtaken by sweeping changes in style and taste.

The fact is, indubitably, that Sicily was not one of the centres where this reawakening sculptural instinct reasserted itself spontaneously in the early Middle Ages. It would have been singular indeed if it had been, considering that Sicily had long been dominated by Saracenic taste and Mohammedan art ideals, with perhaps a slight admixture of the Byzantine element, neither of which, at that time at least, would encourage the production of figure sculpture. So there was even less demand there than elsewhere in Western Christendom, in fact none ; and if perchance some Christian stonemason felt within him certain vague stirrings, tending towards the production of figure sculpture, they would have no outlet, and he would go on producing the composite capitals or delicate leaf-mouldings demanded of him. Nor would the Norman Conquest bring about any immediate changes in this respect. "Norman" art of the first period is, as we have seen—with the sole exception of some puzzling features of Cefalù Cathedral—essentially Sicilian and Byzantine.

Nor is there a single piece of figure sculpture anywhere in or near Palermo pointing to the existence of a primitive Sicilian workshop capable, when developed, of producing work of the quality of the Cappella candlestick and the cloister of Monreale. The cloister of Cefalù has been instanced vaguely as earlier, but our examination has shown that it owes its appearance of age mainly to romantic decay. The superb Paschal candlestick of the Cappella Palatina remains (with the doorway of Cefalù, which is manifestly Lombardo-

Apulian) the only instance of important figure sculpture found in Sicily possibly preceding the cloister of Monreale.

Now this candlestick is, after all, a piece of church furniture and may have been the work of a master called in on purpose, or may even have been imported, as people were wont to import objects of the kind in those days of keen desire, from more progressive centres. It is well known that the workshops of Constantinople did a flourishing trade in the export of painted altar-pieces, textiles, carved ivory diptycha, triptycha, caskets, boxes, &c., and even more unwieldy objects, such as bronze doors (like the famous examples in Amalfi and S. Paolo Fuori le Mura in Rome), and carved capitals, parapets, altar fronts of Prokonesian marble, &c. The founder of the Cappella Palatina, Roger II., and his son William I., who completed the chapel, to whom the candlestick is probably due, were also masters of those flourishing cities on the mainland, Trani, Bari, and others, that were one of the secondary centres of the revival of sculptural art in the early Middle Ages, and were just the kind of personalities—art-loving, appreciative and imperative—to seize the importance of what they saw going on there on their visits, to understand the value of a note of this kind in the decorative and expressive *ensemble* of their beloved

Royal Chapel, and to take steps to secure it, as suggested above, either by calling in a master and his aids, or by direct importation. In any case the candlestick is the work of a master of his craft, the product of several preceding generations of patient endeavour and gradual attainment, in an active art centre.

Questions like these, merely speculative as they may seem to many, have a deep-lying interest nowadays in our wish to account for the problems of "filiation" and "influence," as due to something more living and human than mere mechanical laws of evolution, or representing a still more mechanical "blend" of elements. Sicilian art especially is generally thus described.

We must always remember that without artistic craftsmen there would be no art; that every new potent "influence" (from without), manifesting itself in periods of youth and growth, has had to pass through the eyes, the brain, the receptive faculty, the imagination and the reproductive faculty of an artist-medium.

This is true of all times and periods. The masters of Romanesque sculpture could not put their aims and aspirations into thought, or their thoughts into words, as superbly as Michelangelo, or as delightfully as M. Rodin. They would doubtless be bound in many ways and aided in others by their workshop traditions, and humble hard-working social position. Mediæval folk had a curious way of accommodating themselves to the shell of custom that they had always borne and grown up with ; but for all that, the Masters among them were born with the eyes, the mind, the imagination, the curious irresponsible itch in the fingers, of the artist. To the gifted among them an "influence" meant something seen at the right moment ; an ornamental or fantastic form into which he could pour, sometimes quite unconsciously, the undefined linear rhythms and quaint imaginings that had been vaguely pursuing him ; or a manifestation of knowledge, or mere technique, showing him *how it might be done*, just as he was struggling with the technical difficulties of expression. It is thus that great artists are influenced now, by supreme Greek art, or intense Gothic, by Donatello and Michelangelo ; it is thus that they were "influenced" then. Art, like life, does not deal with an inexhaustible number of leading motives, but they can all be made to live again and again, in the fused fire of an ardent personality. One of the most extraordinary spectacles that history shows is the expansive spread of a living enthusiasm for what we now call art, during the unexampled period of freshness and fervour, now known as the Middle Ages. To the art historian the air seems full of sparks, crossing and recrossing—but if sparks are to ignite, they must fall on the tinder of an artistic temperament.

It is well to bear these things in mind in any attempt to study Mediæval Art. They have moreover a special bearing on the art of Sicily. While too much has been said about the part played by the Norman princes, and far too little about the part played by the artist-craftsmen, the very hybrid and composite nature of Sicilian art makes it incumbent on us to consider the questions connected with the superb play of forces there shown from the rational and human point of view, if we wish to be rewarded by catching glimpses of the motley, many-voiced life in the capital during this twelfth century.

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A page or two must be spared here for the further discussion of this reawakening of the sculptural instinct in the early Middle Ages, one of the most interesting of all the questions connected with the study of Mediæval Art, owing to the part it played in the formation of the new style. There had always been expressive painting of sorts, even in the provinces (in the capital of art, Byzantium, there was indeed an unbroken line of fine pictorial tradition throughout the so-called Dark Ages) and ornamental carving of sorts.

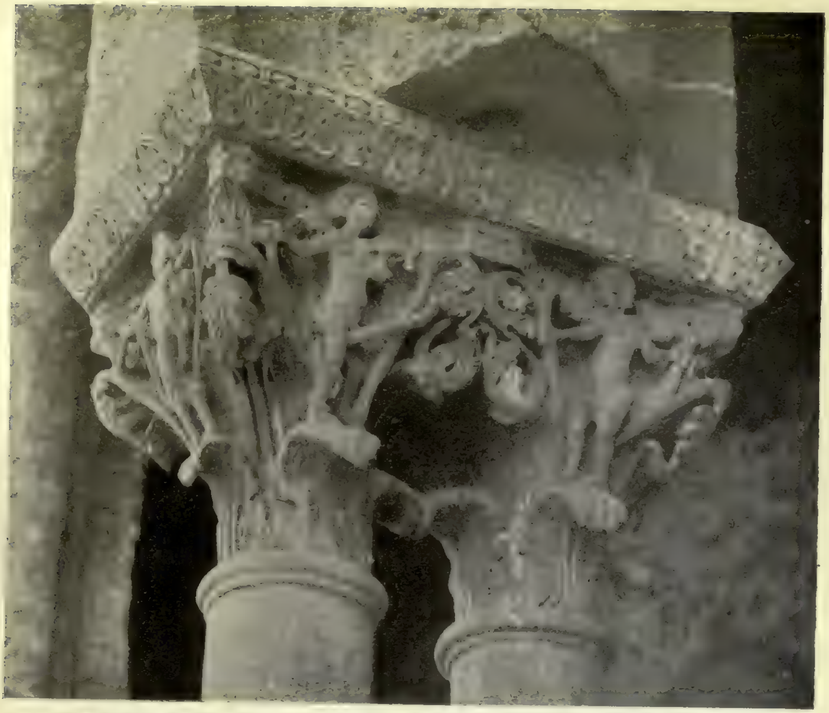
Recent studies have tended to show that there may also have been certain forms of modelling in *gesso* (gilt), or carving in wood (painted), showing that the sculptural instinct was not so entirely dead as has been supposed. In any case the flame must have flickered very feebly, from a variety of causes which do not interest us here. It is only all the more interesting to witness the sudden revival of the flame—as it were spontaneously. In the beginning or towards the middle of the eleventh century the desire for expression in stone seems to have reasserted itself, one fine morning as it were, quite spontaneously, and in the most inexplicable way, in a few favoured centres. M. Michel has pointed out, in his fine chapters on the subject in the "Histoire de l'Art," that they were not centres where there was some kind of classical tradition still lingering. This reawakening must therefore be due to some force from within. It is generally attributed to some "influence" from without, such as a small piece of carved ivory from Byzantium, but this explanation does not account for the significant fact that some regions responded to the stimulus thus supplied, others not.

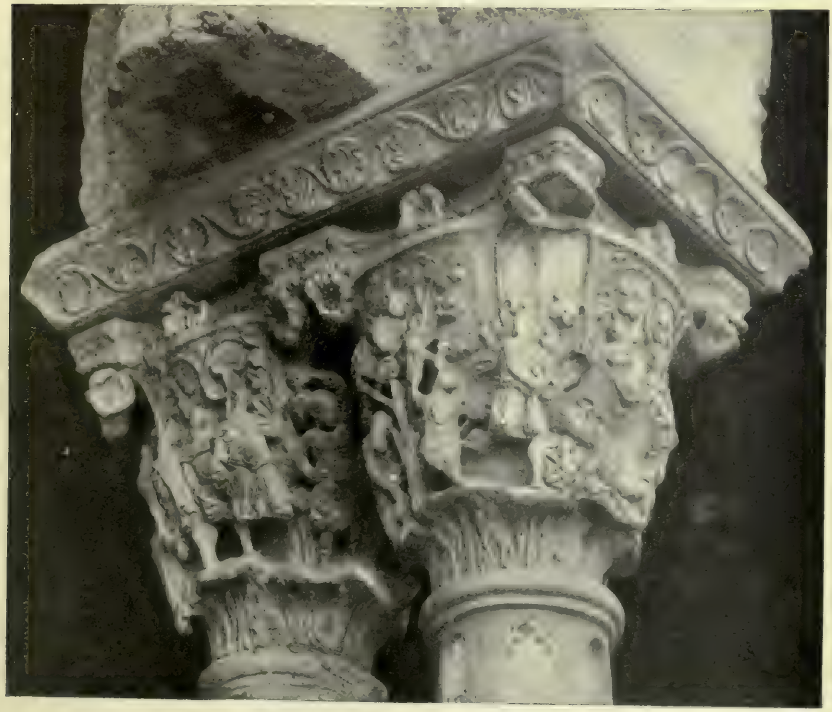
The execution was to begin with doubtless rude, mere rough or grotesque representations of Biblical scenes, Christ in majesty, figures of saints or symbolical subjects; the arrangement rudely naïve, just panels large or small, let into the wall anywhere near the main doorway, where they would be most likely to be noticed, or set up in the tempting space offered by the thickness of the wall where cut through for doorways. Then the round tympanum, previously painted, would be seized hold of; or some bold innovators would even let the heads or half-figures among the rude foliage on the capitals become little groups or scenes. As the sculptural skill grew, with constructive skill growing meanwhile, the carvers, who were also the stonemasons, would find new possibilities for the use of sculpture, and, in doing so, unwittingly hit upon new "principles of composition," and develop (all unknown to themselves, we may be sure) what later became to be known as the "Romanesque" style. We cannot do more than hint at the great change wrought in this way, and call attention to the important part played by the gradual recessing, modulating, and transforming of the doorways, accompanied by a freer and more masterly use of figure sculpture. A comparison between the Roman Pantheon—this shrine of sculpture—on the one hand, and the Cathedral of Amiens—this sculptured shrine—on the other, to take the two extreme terms of comparison, will show the evolution accomplished.

Now the whole of this process, so interesting to the student of evolution, only seems to have taken place in a few special centres: along the Rhine, in Lombardy, and in South-Western France. In other localities, more backward for some reason or other, the same dull craving for expression in stone may have been felt by the local stonemasons, but the process was cut short by the impatience of their lords and masters, lay or clerical, in those days of keen desire and unbounded enthusiasm for what we now call art. The air was full of golden reports of new marvels—and who knows how marvellous they seemed to their contemporaries, the achievements that now seem to us so feeble and misshapen? The many inscriptions still extant praising the masters as "excelling in their art" or "very remarkable" give one a faint notion of the contemporary attitude.

So these masters were called in by those in authority—or gladly welcomed if they came to offer their services—according to the vagrant habits of those days of general reawakening and ardent curiosity. The spirit of adventure was as keen among craftsmen as among knights, when not fettered by the bonds of servitude, or sobered by a grand piece of work at home calling out all their creative energies.

The important part played by immigration in the spread and formation of the mediæval styles has long been recognised. The untiring investigations of French, German and Russian scholars of the last fifteen or twenty years have only tended to confirm our sense of this importance, and to show us the whole of Mediæval Europe spread over, as it were, with big waves and small ripples of influence and counter-influences. In predisposed localities a ripple or two would be enough to set the latent forces free. This seems to have been the case in Apulia, where one easily notices, in early Mediæval Art, a double set of influences: the Lombard influence, almost certainly due to immigration, though no names of craftsmen have been handed down to us; the Byzantine influence, due partly to immigration and close contact in general with the former rulers, but due also to this other cause, discussed above: direct visual impression, coming at the right moment, of products of superior craftsmanship and fascinating suggestiveness. There are in Apulian art unmistakable signs of Lombard influence, and almost direct evidence of the direct copying of Byzantine carvings in ivory, of which the carved lintel at the Martorana in Palermo is an instance; but it was copying in the grand free mediæval way, taking a suggestion from the carved border of an ivory casket for the superb scroll of one of their magnificent doorways.





o theory of influence can take away from the originality, the true Romanesque audacity and sense of form of Apulian sculpture. Is it to be wondered at that the art-loving Norman kings, the rulers of Trani and Bari, should have called in representatives of workshops of this uncontested superiority ?

* * *

They were not the only ones at work at Monreale, called in to hasten the completion of the ambitious cloister, or flocking in as the report spread of the great work going on. Several of these waves of influence have reached Monreale and co-operated in the formation of what may perhaps be called the Sicilian school of sculpture, a blend of many elements, fused into one by work in common ; a busy workshop, working under the direction of a skilled master, wise enough to let individual talent have full play while forming a school from among the sons of the immigrants or the few exceptionally gifted young Sicilian apprentices. The result is this marvellous cloister, unrivalled for size, grandeur, and varied interest. It would be futile and pedantic to try and trace every one of the two hundred and sixteen twin capitals to its origin. If the sources of inspiration seems evident in some cases, in others we are evidently in the presence of a style evolved in this workshop of Monreale; in others again it is quite easy to see affinities, as one warms to the work—but unwise to insist on them.

* * *

The famous cloister has been restored, and lost some of the charm that until lately clung round it. Shafts have been scraped and left rather raw in the process, a brand-new roof of bright red tiles put on.

The charm reasserts itself as one opens the book of study. It is the most fascinating of picture books to begin with, full of delightful representations of the vintage (Pl. XL.) and the consequences; an elderly man (Noah) asleep under a tree, with a little crowd of shocked bystanders; a tired wayfarer (Jacob) trudging sturdily along, his bundle slung on a staff over his shoulder, or masons busily at work building a tower; a swineherd (November) tending his pig under an oak; a juggler standing on his head, or a lady seated at a banquet with a kneeling page offering her a cup of wine, and a maiden bringing fruit. On this same twin capital there is a palm-tree, a lion striking down his prey, two huntsmen and a knight with a shield. Knights are often represented, sometimes running full tilt against one another, sometimes attacking or pursuing wild beasts—the most spirited little figure imaginable among the leaves of acanthus—but there are also elderly men, pointed out as prophets by their names, sedately seated on thrones, surrounded by naked *putti*, beasts, birds, and a luxuriant vine-leaf scroll growing up out of vases. On this same capital there is a pretty rendering of the Annunciation. On another the famous Dedication panel with the inscription "REX QUI CUNCTA REGIS, SICULI DATA SUSCIPE REGIS."

There are representations of the mystic symbolism of the Church ; more scenes from Bible history, treated freely as scenes of contemporary life ; the story of Joseph, of Samson, of Lazarus, and others ; the whole solemn Nativity cycle, beginning with the Annunciation ; or some crowded episodes from the life of a Saint. More joyous vintage scenes, in which they evidently delighted, without even the excuse of dealing with Noah. Fat naked boys seated on candelabra and swinging ropes of flowers, or nude men (Pl. XXXIX.) strangling serpents. All the symbolic monsters of the Bestiaries, and a good many other animals besides, elegant winged griffins, uncanny dragons, a serpent drinking out of the same cup as a lamb, real bulls or lions or birds—and a mermaid with a forked tail entwined with some kind of apocalyptic beasts.

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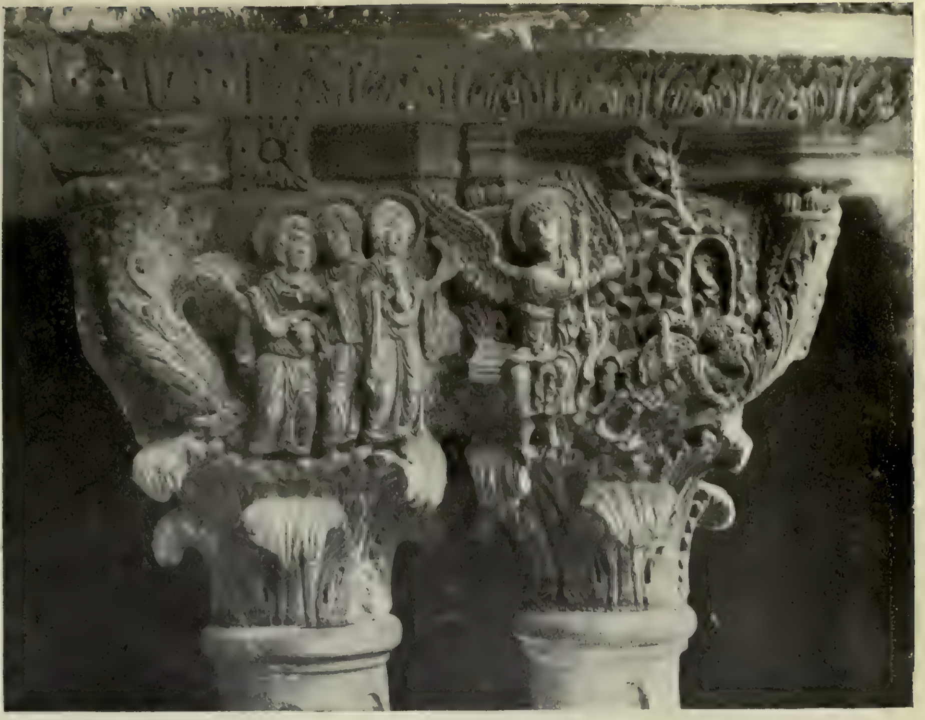
On some of these capitals the acanthus foliage has been reduced by the stress of expression to a mere rim or collar at the base of the capital. In the prevailing type, however, the figures stand or sit poised on the bent leaves of the acanthus, or are intermixed with it curiously and capriciously, so that, for instance, one finds a rearing bull at an angle when one expects a bent leaf or two. A charming group is represented by Pl. XL. with an elegant scroll filling the space behind the figures, and a kind of pretty flower (convolvulus?) taking the place of the spirals. The heavy cornucopias on Pl. XLI. are also noticeable as evidently inspired by the capitals in the nave of the cathedral—but there is no limit or end to the decorative *brio* of the Monreale workshop.

There is also a certain number of fine and original Corinthian derivatives; some Byzantesque with birds pecking at clusters of grapes hung at the angles, recalling those of the Zisa (there are also some Byzantesque basket capitals with little men bunched up at the angles); others, a large group, Græco-Roman, some of them evidently inspired again by the beautiful classical capitals of the interior, with their cornucopia, replacing volutes, at the angles. It is one of these that has a signature: "EGO ROMANUS FILIUS CONSTANTINUS MARMURARIUS."

XLI



CAPITALS, CLOISTER, MONREALE

Incorpora, Palermo

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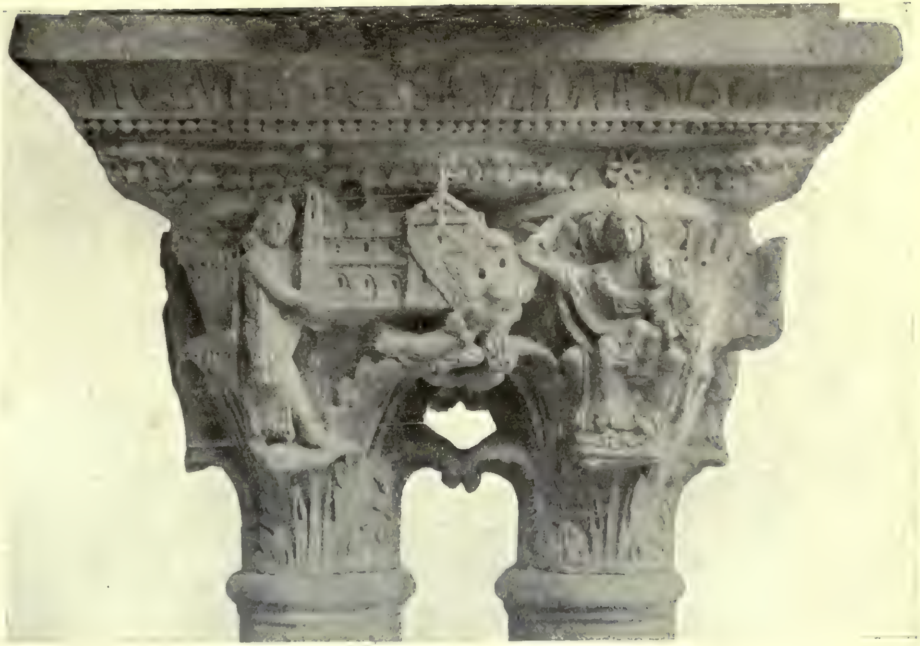
Why? This signature cannot represent the master of the whole cloister as was first believed in the joy of "discovery," it is not quite possible to identify him with any of the best work. Then why did he put his signature to a purely decorative capital? In his naïve pride at having formed a new variant of this decorative formula which met with the approbation of his fellows? There are several capitals of this type scattered throughout the cloister. And why "the son of Constantine the worker in marble"? Was this Constantine a famous craftsman to be thus mentioned by his son with pride? A very fascinating hypothesis might be constructed if one could only accept the suggestion of V. di Giovanni, who identifies this Constantine with the *Constantinus dictus marmorarius*, *frater olim magistri Simonis marmorarii, de Civitate Panormi*, who in 1202 offered himself in oblation to the Teutonic order, giving all his earthly possessions to the church of the Magione (V. di Giov. "Top. Antica," v. ii, p. 263). In that case one might perhaps stretch conjecture a little further and even identify either Constantinus or his brother, Master Simon, with the master of the Candlestick—the father, uncle and ancester of a dynasty of carvers. Both evidence of style and mediæval workshop traditions as shown in the well-known instance of the Pisan masters would bear out this fanciful conjecture—which must not be taken too seriously.

As one studies the cloister certain tendencies and individualities emerge distinctly. There are several master minds: one a story-teller born, but still imperfect in his means of expression and crowded in his composition. This is the master of the Three Maries, who might possibly be a near relative of the master of the Candlestick. Another has far more skill, and a charming sense of grace and sobriety, his little figures, generally single ones, are all but perfect. This is the "master of the Presentation of the Church." Evidently younger or "later" than the master of the Three Maries, as shown by the finer modelling, more flowing acanthus, and greater ease and delicacy of treatment generally, he shows enough affinity in style to belong to the same *bottega* or family. (This also holds good of "Ego Romanus.") Careful and repeated examination has convinced me that all the best representations of little knights and jolly huntsmen are due to this same master of the Presentation—a man who in more propitious times would have gained name and fame as the sculptor of grace and vivacious action (shown even in his unconventional rendering of this Dedication or Presentation motive). As there are several similar capitals by lesser men, we may perhaps be allowed to consider this type as



WILLIAM II. PRESENTING THE CATHEDRAL OF MONREALE
TO THE VIRGIN MARY, CLOISTER, MONREALE

Incorpora, Palermo

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evolved at Monreale. Other capitals represent the neo-classical tendency. To these belong our illustration (Pl. XL.), with its suggestion of almost Pompeian quality, and the capital with the story of Samson near the north-east corner, so evidently inspired by some late Roman bas-relief, with its well-arranged rows of broad curly heads and its classical draperies. It is difficult to think of the carvers of either of these capitals as grown up in Palermo, far away from all classical associations or hereditary promptings. Moreover, these capitals are surely later than the Presentation capital and must therefore belong to the thirteenth century, and the time when, owing to the renewed prosperity of the abbey, due to Frederic II., the work on the cloister could be taken up again, after a long period of disorder and impoverishment during the emperor's minority, when surely no work was attempted. It was then, more probably, that the workshop of Monreale disbanded, and the craftsmen sought work elsewhere, thus sending a wave of influence rippling out over the mainland, to add to those already in motion. There was evidently a return wave in the thirteenth century, from the joyous, semi-pagan, neo-classical school of sculpture, fostered, if not called into being, as some writers have supposed—no art worth having was ever produced at the bidding of princes—by

Frederic II., for his great building undertakings at Castel del Monte, Capua, and elsewhere. It is to these workshops that the neo-classical capitals of Monreale are due,* also the finest and most refined of the carved shafts at the angles, and the ball or knob carved with the dancing women at the top of the famous fountain.

To this school belongs, further, the top of the Cappella Palatina candlestick and a baptismal font with charming representations of the Months, that has found its way to Lentini on the east coast.

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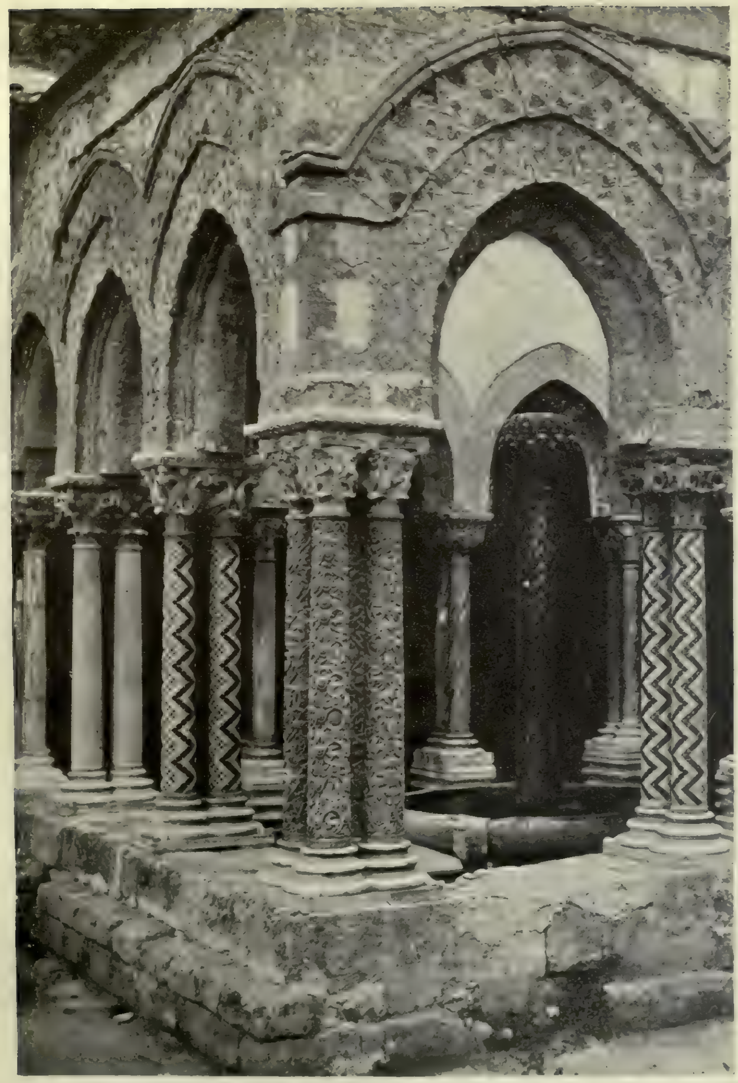
* *Cf.* the closely allied work at Sta. Reparata in Naples.



CLOISTER, MONREALE

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CHAPTER XI

FREDERIC II. AND SICILIAN GOTHIC

The influence of Frederic II. on Palermitan art is by no means so great as one might infer from his brilliant eclecticism, his art-loving disposition and the fame of his oft-described poetic and learned court in Palermo. Probably this is so by virtue of this very eclecticism, of which we catch such amusing glimpses in Arabic accounts of his visit to Jerusalem as a keenly curious and reverential sightseer. When night falls and the evening call to prayer is not heard, he is greatly disappointed, and, turning to the Caid, asks for an explanation. The Caid replies that he had given orders to suppress it for that night only out of regard for him, the emperor ; whereupon this precursor of the intelligent modern tourist answers—after gently observing that in his countries the Caid would hear it observed—that he makes a mistake, by Allah !—the main reason why he, the emperor, had arranged to spend a night at Jerusalem was in order to hear the call to prayer and the laudations recited by the Muslims during the night.

It is not likely that a man of this stamp would care to make any changes in the semi-oriental palace on the city walls, with its hanging gardens and Lion Court open to the sky, its airy *loggie* and golden halls, endeared to him as the home of his childhood. It is therefore in this setting that we must place the poetic court aforesaid, where Arab poets still found a welcome—and never forget, besides, that the stays of the emperor in Sicily were intermittent.

He seems to have kept the palace in repair, to judge by the Suabian eagle occurring in mosaic in the ceiling of the "Roger Room," and among the very Saracenic scrolls of a piece of carved panelling, now in the Museum. He also demanded a good deal from the *tirâz*, and some of the silk brocades dating from his reign are among the most charming of all. He may also have had something to do with bringing or sending carvers to Monreale to complete the cloister, from the flourishing schools of neo-classical sculpture that had blossomed forth, the time being ripe and the talent latent, in Southern Italy, in response to his demand for craftsmen for his great building undertakings at Castel del Monte, Lucera, Foggia, and Capua.

But it is a curious and significant fact that there is no monumental sculpture or even important decorative sculpture anywhere in Sicily due to him or stimulated by him.

Nor does any monumental work seem to have been demanded of the mosaicist's workshop, kept up, as we have seen, for repairs. Nothing at least has survived, unless one counts the sweet cherubim in the vaults of Cefalù. (There are some belated mosaics still *in situ* in the semi-ruined apses of Messina Cathedral. Somewhat too brown and void in colour-tone and general effect, with faces too white and staring, they still in some respects show the fine Sicilian tradition, applied to interesting late mediæval subjects, kings and queens, an archbishop and a duke, standing or kneeling in prayer before Christ, St. John the Evangelist, and the Madonna. The female group, happily preserved, is full of pure, sweet mediæval feeling and charm, in a sober and, as it were, chastened but harmonious colour-scheme.)

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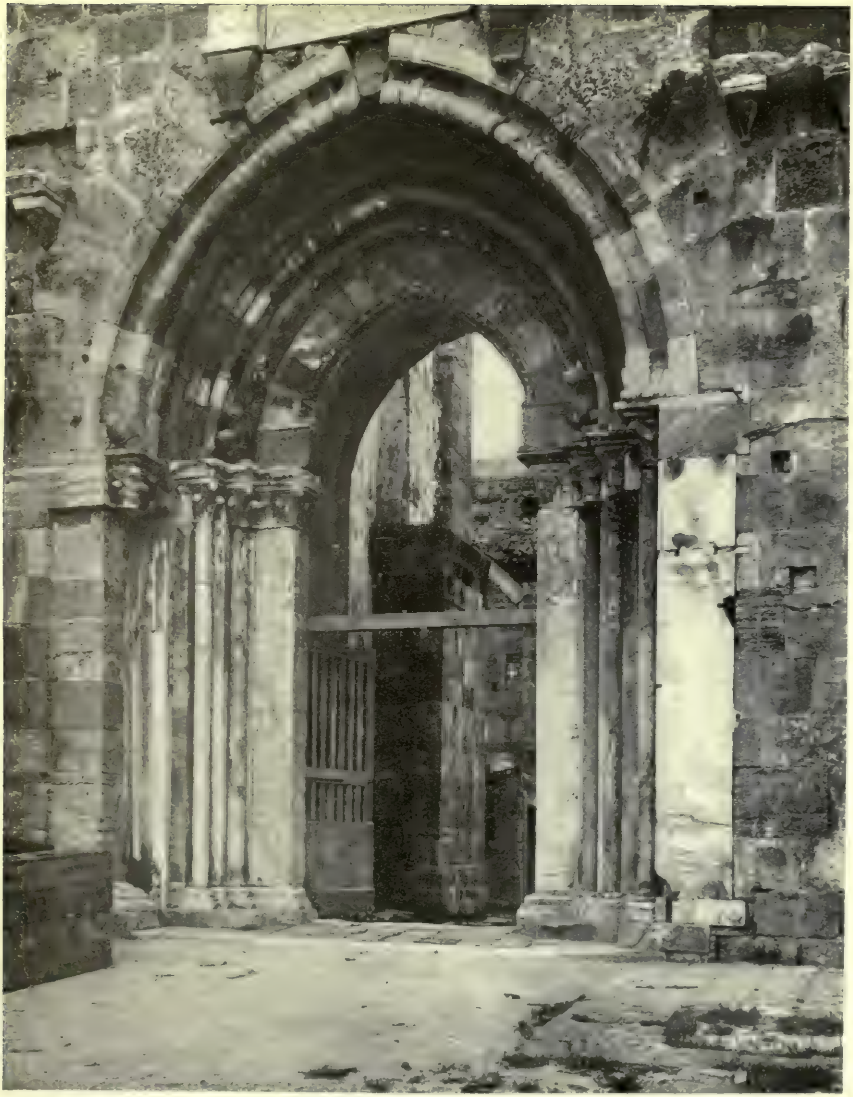
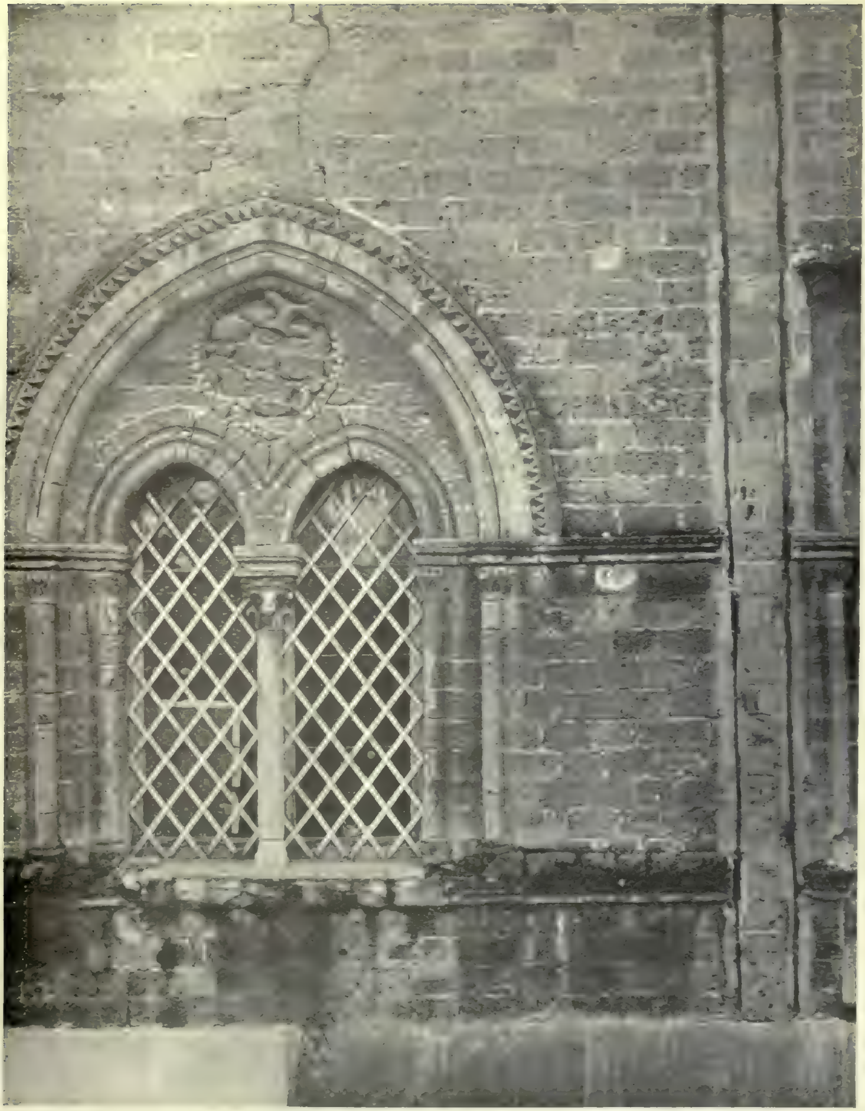
The Emperor Frederic was, however, a great builder of castles, calling in French engineers and French stonemasons for the purpose. One of the finest of these, combining graceful strength with exquisite elegance, is the Castello di Maniace, guarding the harbour of Syracuse. Nearly all the beautiful forms are here purely French. French in conception is the spacious hall, with its two bays of fine vaulting, its superb windows, its handsome fireplace, so unexpected in sunny Syracuse. The capitals on either side of this fireplace show what might possibly be a certain Apulian (neo-classical) influence, in Corinthian capitals and fine classical mouldings. The pilasters and small inset shafts below these are gone.

French is the doorway, with its clear musical mouldings, French the sprightly crocketed capitals; there is no doubt, no question to one familiar with the French architectual idiom. Only here it is translated into fine clear-cut marbles, where a shimmering rose-colour, rich black and white, used darker and lighter, as the occasion demanded, combine with pure white and silvery grey into exquisite polychromy—evidently due to southern inspiration. Further assimilation of southern standards of taste is shown in the rows of carved upright leaves in the mouldings, and, more interesting still, four projecting Lombardo-Apulian grotesque beasts, suggesting either that the architect had tarried in Italy by the way, with an artistic mind open to suggestions, or possibly that the execution of the doorway was in part entrusted to Italian workmen by the French architect, keeping,



Alinari DOORWAY, CASTELLO DI MANIACE, SYRACUSE *p.* 236



GOTHIC WINDOW, PALERMO

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however, a firmer eye on them than was done at Castel del Monte, near Adria (in Apulia), where whole doorways are purely neo-classical, while the details of the *grande salle* are purely French.

This doorway was originally flanked by brackets bearing the two famous Greek rams in bronze, one of which is now in the museum in Palermo.

After the death of Conradin, the last of the Hohenstaufen, in 1266, the island was occupied by the French for sixteen years. This circumstance, combining with the influence exercised by the Castello of Maniace, and perhaps of the architectural style introduced by the Teutonic knights, may perhaps explain why some of the Gothic palaces of Sicily are so much nearer, let us say, Transalpine Gothic in type, than contemporary palaces in Tuscany, for instance. This is specially noticeable in the windows, with their fine Gothic proportions, set off by rich mouldings, or even a dog-tooth ornament, and the crisp foliage of the capitals, compared with the well-known windows of Florence and Siena. One beautiful palace window of this type in Palermo may be French, as it bears the French fleur-de-lis, but two of the finest palaces in Taormina bear the same character, combined, moreover, with lovely tracery.

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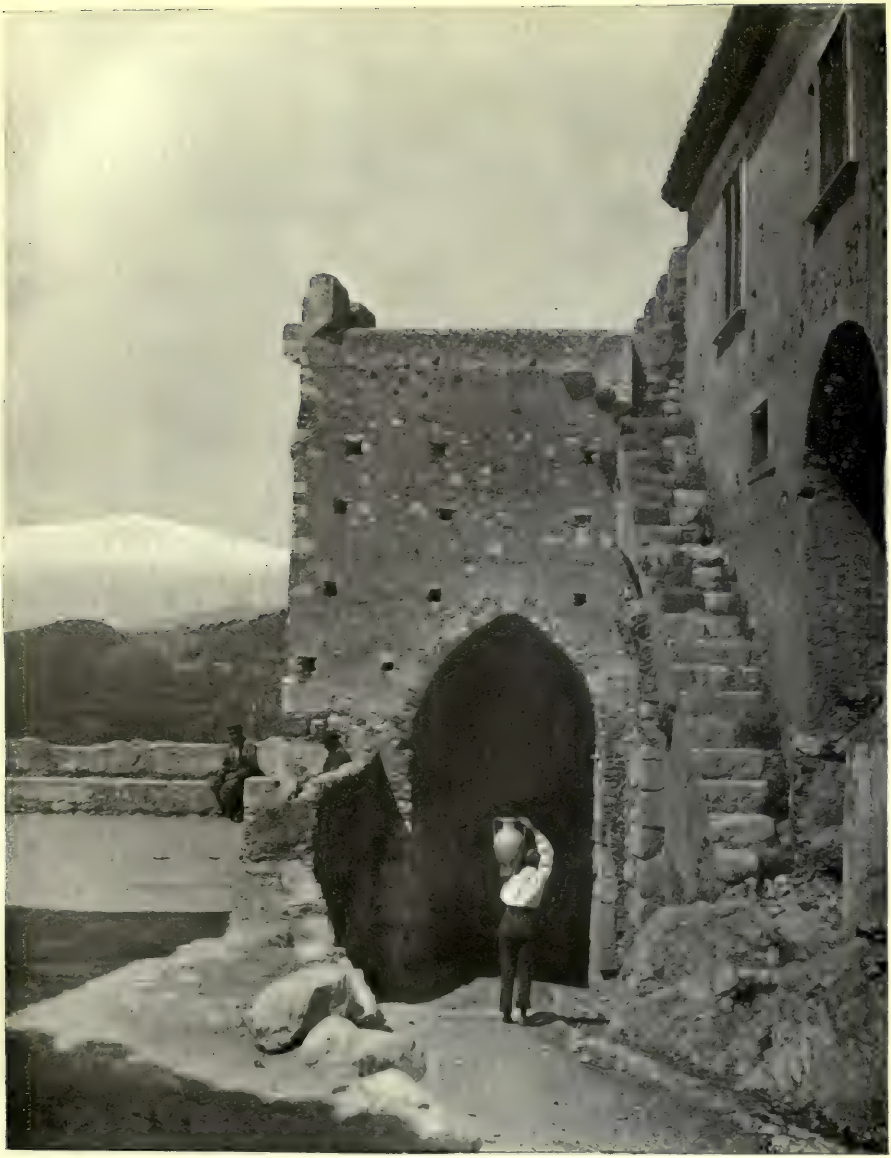
A page must be given here to a mention of Taormina, which is of more real interest to the mediæval student than it seems—during the season, when it must be admitted that there is nowadays a certain air of unreality, of *opéra-comique* or *vieux Paris* even, about the neat little toy town with its well-arranged squares, showing a clock-tower to the right, a church to the left, with a distant southern sea and a faint blue volcano beyond, with its main street turned into an open bazaar where hordes of tourists wander up and down, aimlessly buying souvenirs. Yet go there if you can in May when the tourists have departed and the spirit of the place sings his song again, to the accompaniment of the perfume of the mandarines, and you will find that all this is real and very interesting, an almost perfectly preserved little mediæval city, with its double circle of walls and gates, where the well-to-do aristocracy of the region, in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries (there are no later palaces of importance), lived in fairy palaces with enchanted views, possibly then as now scattered among gardens, certainly surrounded by palm-trees which to this day spring up wind-sown ; palaces that seem a playful adaptation of French Gothic forms to this luxurious southern, open-air existence. The well-known Badia, belonging to the Teutonic knights, has the three noble traceried windows of the main floor set



THE PORTA DI CATANIA, TAORMINA

Crupi, Taormina

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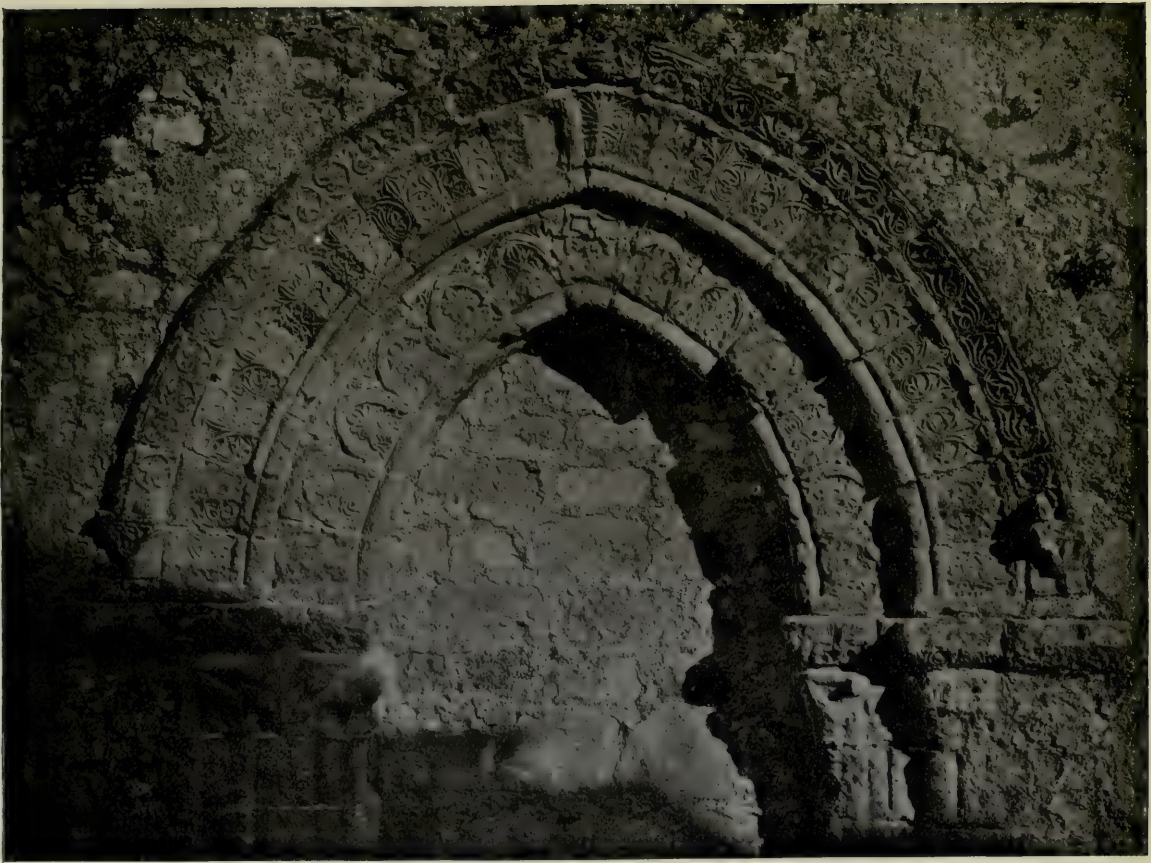
so close as to make it seem almost a *loggia*, built up there on purpose to enjoy the view. The tiny Palazzo del Duca di S. Stefano is more French in plan ; it has a *grande salle* with one central pillar supporting the ribs of the magnificent vaulting, a perron or outside stairway, now, alas! in an eighteenth-century version, and below the *grande salle*, a bath, also vaulted, with a conduit for running water.

There are several outside stairways in courtyards at Taormina ; one in the Palazzo Corvaja, dating from A.D. 1372, and interesting also as showing the development of later Gothic forms on lines parallel with those we observe in Transalpine Gothic ; *i.e.* the pointed arch becomes an ogee, mouldings become heavier and duller, foliage tends to become thicker and clumsier if often handsome in effect. This type of later Gothic, more Northern than Italian, is not unfrequently met with all over Sicily.

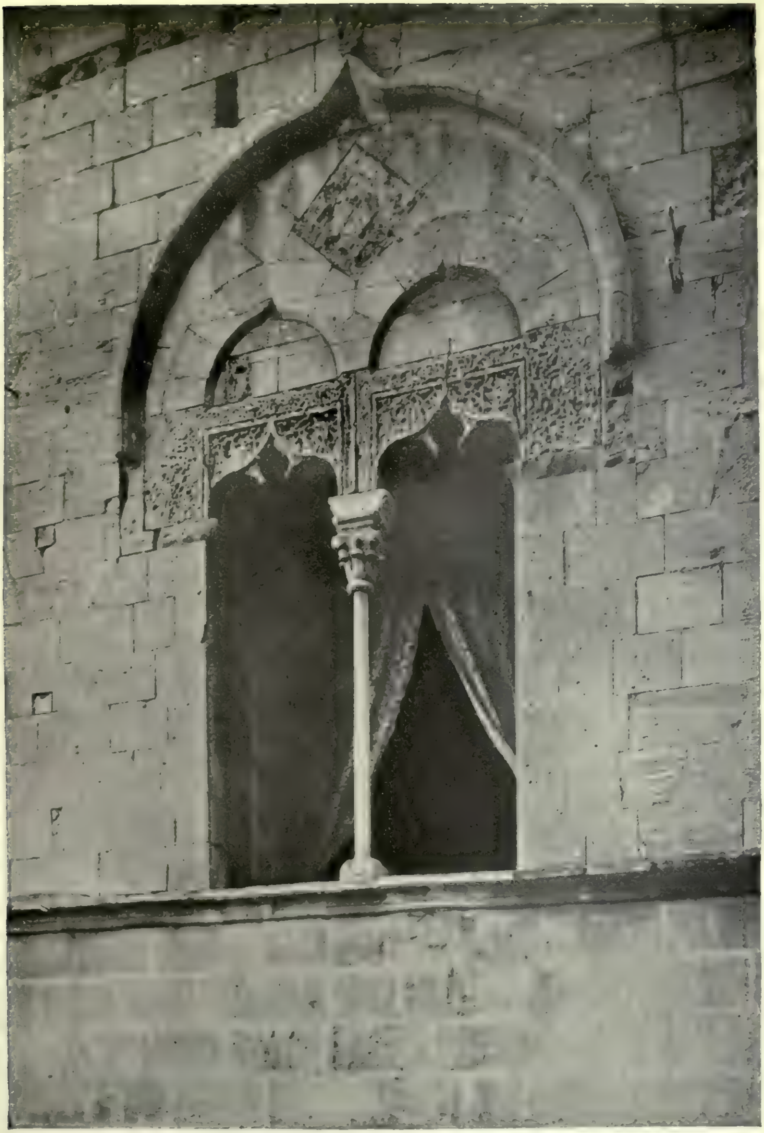
Alongside of these more or less Transalpine forms there was doubtless from the beginning a more distinctly Sicilian style of treatment characterised by a kind of decorative embroidery in stone, which has lost all sculptural accent, and has much in common with the fine Saracenic pressed plaster work of Norman times (compare especially the treatment of the foliage on the arch at Bivona, Pl. XLVIII.), often combining, in the fourteenth century, with the slender delicate window-shafts, and the daintiest detail in capitals and toy brackets, in a style that is very Sicilian. The most charming instances of this are perhaps the two well-known windows in Syracuse.

A complete study of Sicilian Gothic would comprise the analysis and description of several other variations in style and a good many buildings. For our purpose it must suffice to say that there are mediæval palaces and churches scattered all over Sicily, full of variety, and of the charm of local colour, in the treatment of doorways and windows, if not of any great importance momumentally; indeed, almost the only attempt at figure sculpture representing Adam and Eve, on the staircase of the Palazzo Corvaja at Taormina, does not convince one that the sculptor's art was one of the many gifts of the highly gifted Sicilian race.

We find this confirmed in the large cities. The fine, effective and original west front of Palermo Cathedral (fourteenth century) with this exquisite carved detail that hardly ever fails one in Sicily, has only one small piece of figure sculpture, the Madonna in the tabernacle at the top of the bold decorative arch. When Matteo Sclafani wanted a very fine carved eagle for his magnificent palace, he had to employ a Pisan master, Bonajutus, who has signed his work, to carve it for him. In Messina



Alinari ARCH, BIVONA *p.* 240



PALACE WINDOW, SYRACUSE

Alinari

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the central doorway, still partly uninjured, with its queer audacious blend of styles—from fourteenth-century Mediæval to full-blown Renaissance—of forms and conceptions; with long bands of pure *genre*, or almost caricature, rollicking representations of scenes of daily life, let into the encrusted wall on either side of a Gothic doorway, where naked *putti*, poorly modelled, run riot among vine-leaves across the shafts of the jambs, and a Cinquecento Madonna occupies the tympanon, seated under an over-ripe Gothic gable; this doorway at first seems delightfully full of local colour, but only represents, really, belated successive waves of immigration from the Continent, the schools of Lombardy and Tuscany, where, one suspects, the sculptors perhaps let themselves go with less restraint than at home.

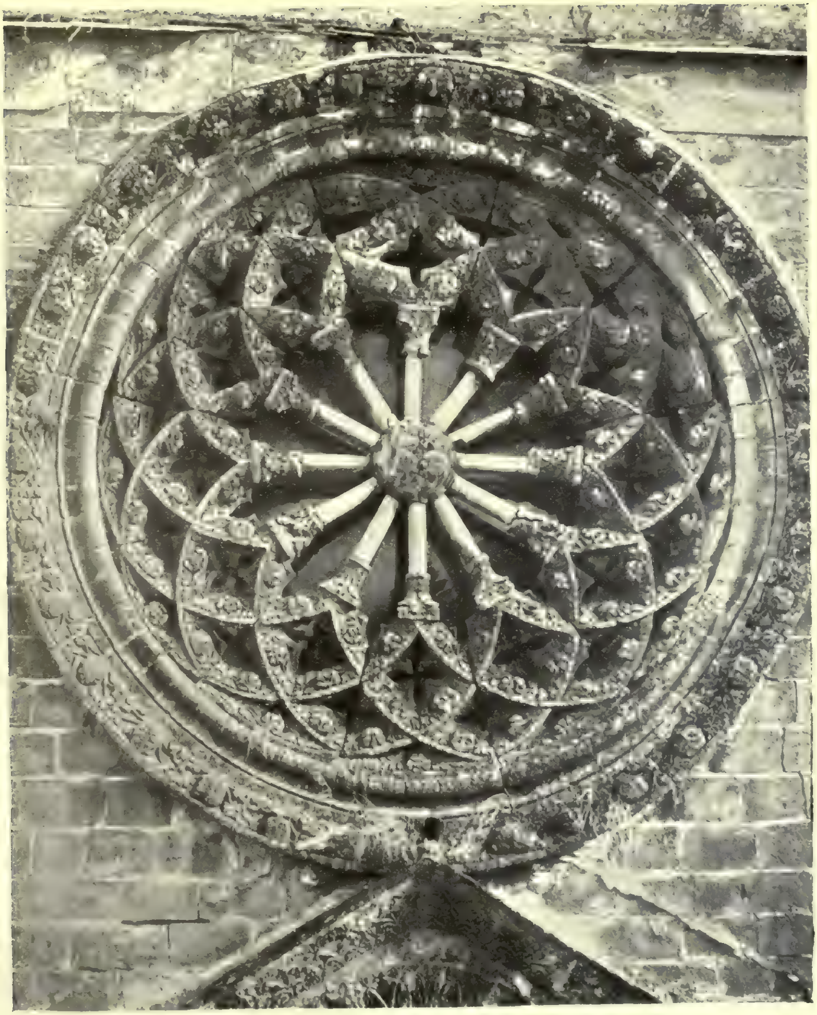
⁂

If there were no figure sculptors of importance in later Mediæval Sicily, or indeed hardly any at all, there was, instead, as I have had occasion to mention more than once, a flourishing school of gifted carvers of ornament, producing one of these delightful local styles that are so refreshing to the student and such a joy to the artist.

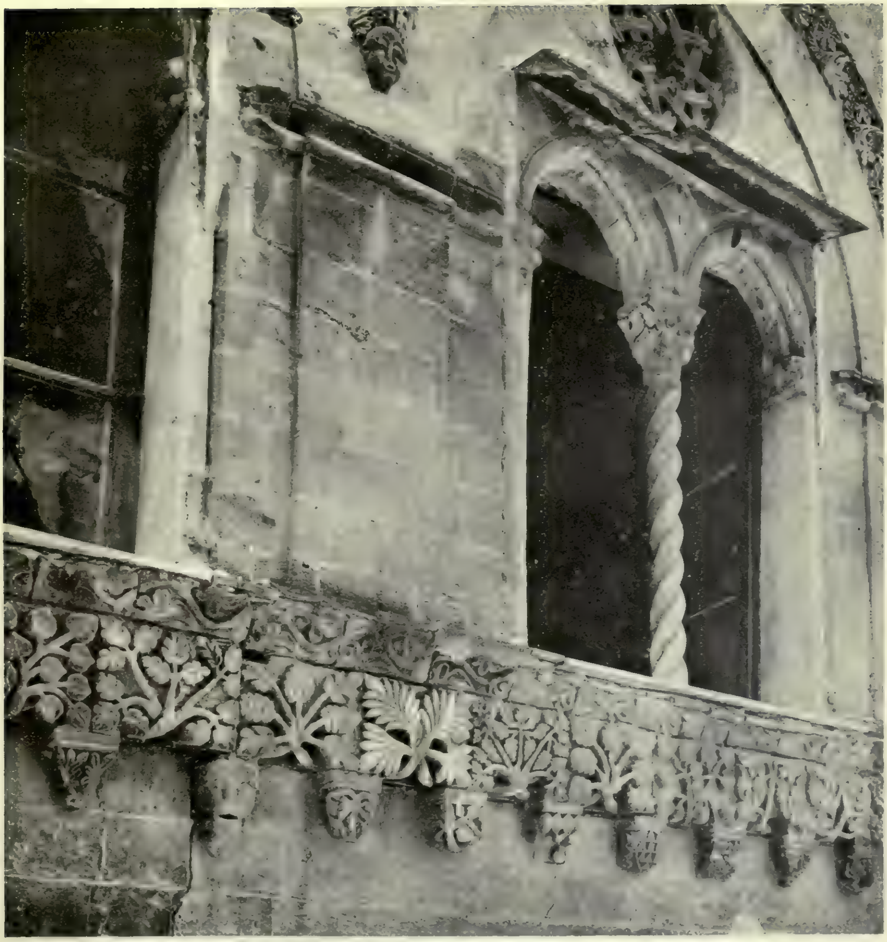
In Palermo especially, but also elsewhere, this was combined with an inheritance from the Saracens, with decorative inlays in lava (pumice-stone) or later a black composition. There is a very fine instance of this in the well-known west doorway of St. Agostino (fourteenth century). The other great Franciscan church, S. Francesco d'Assisi, is now restored, but the arrangement of the two fronts may be compared.

The most delightful instance of exuberant carved ornament, small in scale and quite delicate in treatment, is to be found on one of the two so-called *Case normanne* in the Salita St. Antonio, formerly one of the three main arteries of the mediæval inner city, now a quiet side street, where the large open doorway-lobbies of the old Renaissance palaces have been turned into *bassi* for the poor: combined small workshops, kitchens and bedrooms, open to the air all day.

The twisted shafts and knotted tracery date this palace as contemporary with the Palazzo Chiaramonte (first quarter of the fourteenth century). Side by side with this there are four well-preserved windows or window-heads, perhaps earlier, which might more properly be called "Norman," as the clear-cut dainty ornament is geometric, consisting exclusively of various chevrons, triangles and "dog-tooth" diamonds. Only unfortunately this dog-tooth ornament, which we meet with all over Sicily, never occurs in Norman times.



ROSE WINDOW, S. AGOSTINO, PALERMO *p.* 242



"CASA NORMANNA," PALERMO

Date, first half of fourteenth century.

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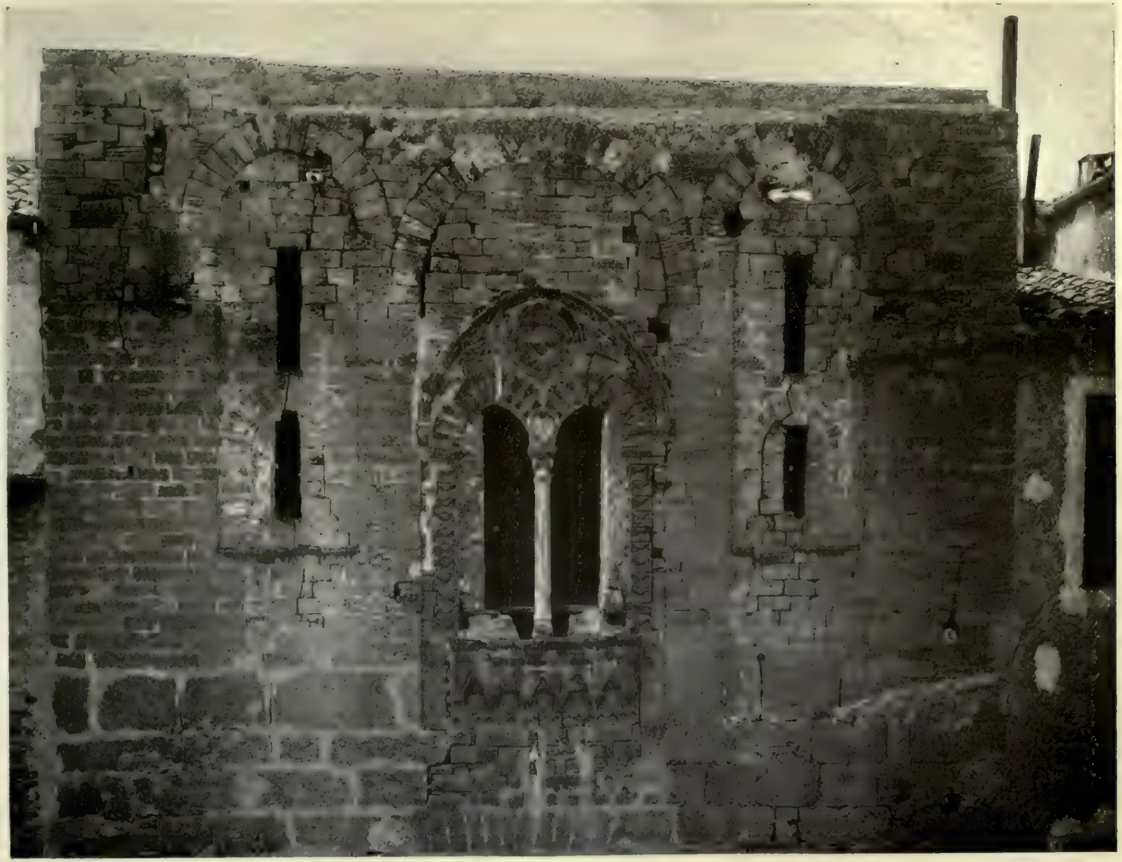
There are a goodly number of interesting mediæval palaces, or bits of them, in Palermo. As nothing is known about them (except two) I shall here only mention a few of the most interesting and less well known.

On or in the old city wall, looking south, there is the Palazzo Sclafani, which I shall mention later, and the Torre del Conte Federigo, remains of a tower in a commanding position looking down the slope over the old river-bed of the Kenonia. It has a curious unrestored window, early in date, but complicated by later inlays in the Chiaramonte style. In the interior there is a very rich, late carved window, now inaccessible. On the city wall, looking north, there are some superb windows, or remains of windows, nameless, dateless, and known only to the favoured few, in what was once a magnificent position looking out over the sugar-mills and sedgy banks of the river Papiretus and the populous quarter of Seralcadì on the heights opposite. The city walls have not been pulled down here, as they have farther up; the old Norman walls incorporating still older portions, still rise up sheer from the small courtyards in the neat houses of the Via Candelai, to what seems the dizzy level of the Via del Celso above. A most suggestive glimpse of the windows may be got here;

they are best seen and studied from the broad terrace outside the Tipografia in the Via del Celso, which now occupies the rooms of the palace. Inside nothing mediæval now remains, outside mainly one coupled window in elegant thirteenth-century style, with fine mouldings containing a nail-head, and floriated capitals. A date there is, after all, though only an approximate one. The tiny shield between the two lights of the window bears a French fleur-de-lis, thus dating the window as at least earlier than 1282. This would make it the earliest specimen known of domestic architecture in Palermo, except and after the Casa Marturanu (*see* Pl. XLV.).

From the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there are reminders of past splendour in the busy populous streets, still thoroughfares, on the gentle heights above the Mercato Nuovo to the north. In the courtyard of a house in the Via San Basilio, nearly opposite the Palazzo Pietratagliata, there was, in 1908, what was once a tower, with a pretty and very original coupled window in the "dainty" style, built out on finely proportioned brackets, with charming, carved, strewn flowers in the hollows, and a very tall slender monolith column of white marble. The Palazzo Pietratagliata is the most "mediæval" in appearance, to our Northern notions, of all the palaces of Palermo, with its old



THE TORRE DEL CONTE FEDERIGO, PALERMO

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tower and tall ground floor, broken only by two little irregular windows, flanking the massive doorway. The detail is all late Gothic (fifteenth century), except one little coupled window in the (older) tower, remarkably Northern in character. Turning from the delicate elegance of the window in the courtyard opposite, it seems like going to another architectural clime, to come upon these sombre, plain wall-surfaces, these round-arched windows with hood-mouldings resting on broad squat corbels having fantastic late Gothic carvings of Ba-birds with outspread wings, lions' claws mixed up with long bearded faces, snarling griffins and bossy late Gothic foliage.

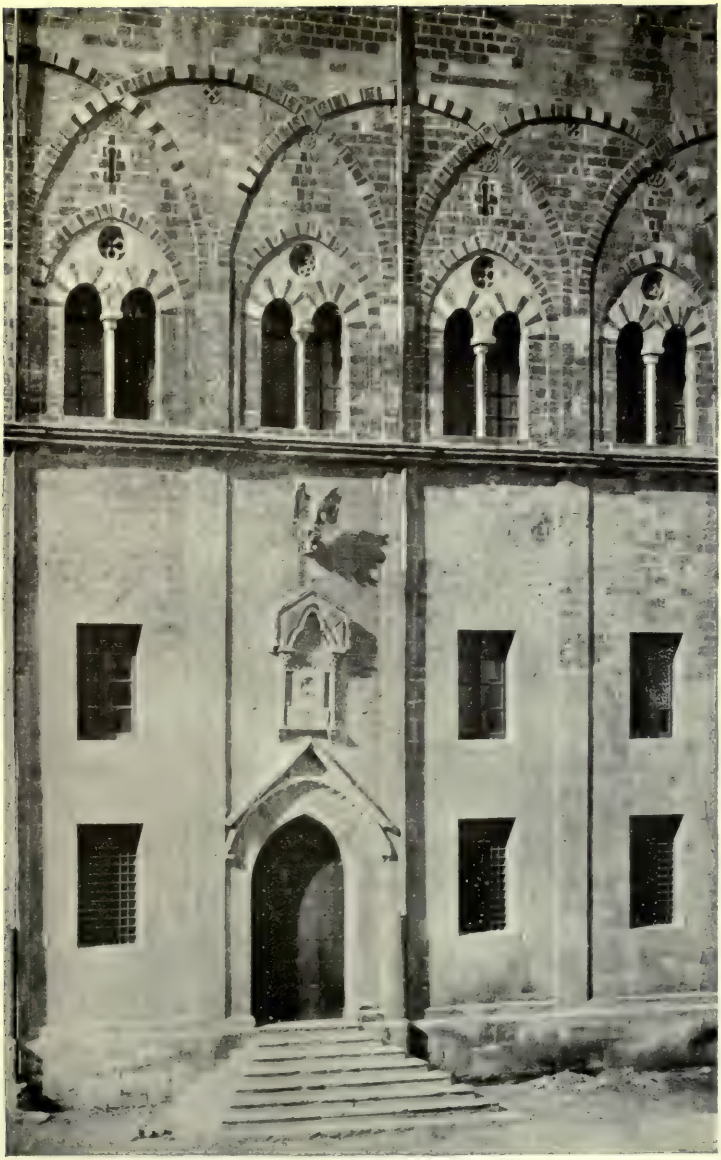
Certain handsome late "mediæval" palaces and charming little churches in Palermo really date from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and thus lie outside the limits set for this book. Apart from their indubitable architectural merits, they are interesting as survivals, as instances of insular conservatism, of a truly Sicilian blend of old and new.

⁂

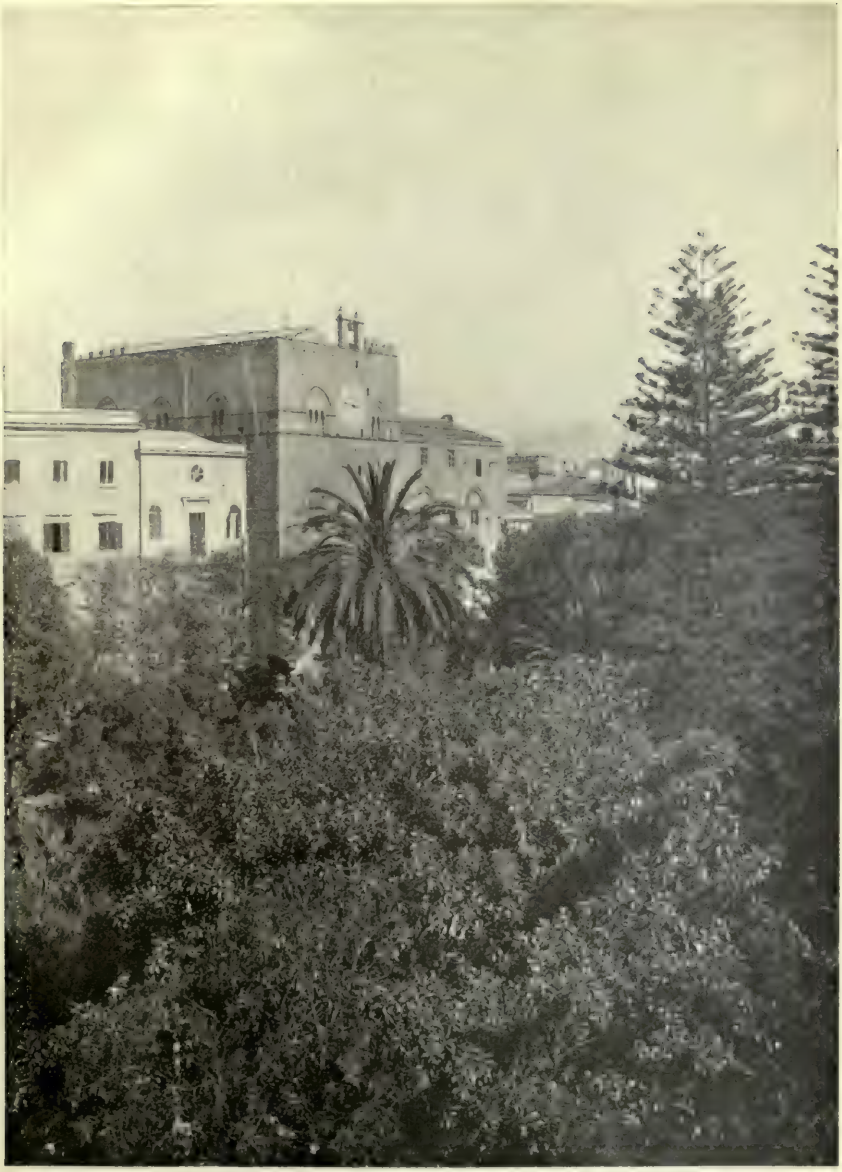
The two most splendid palaces in Palermo have a perfectly well-known history.

The Palazzo Sclafani was built by Matteo Sclafani in 1329–30, as the result of a wager between him and his brother-in-law (and rival for power), Manfred di Chiaramonte, that he would build a palace within a year, larger and more magnificent than Manfred's palace on the Piazza Maritima: and magnificent it is, or what there is still left of it ; an inner courtyard, parts of the old façades in places, and the main doorway surmounted by the finely carved little Pisan tabernacle, by Bonajutus, enclosing or bearing various appropriate coats of arms, those of the Sclafani, of Palermo, of Sicily and of Aragon. If Matteo Sclafani had to go to Pisa for exquisite carving, he evidently has found an architect at home who could plan nobly and on a grand scale round two courtyards, design fine proportions, and adorn his main story with superb decorative wall arcades, evidently inspired by the Arabo-Norman ones on the apses of the two great cathedrals. There are no inlays, but a rich polychromatic (and Saracenesque) effect is obtained by the use of alternate light and dark stones in the intersecting arches, and carved raised disks, or rounds of plate tracery of the Chiaramonte type.

The inner court has a lovely arcade on the first floor, curiously enough with fine varied Romanesque columns and capitals of white marble, resembling those of the Loggia dell' Incoronata. This eclectic antiquarianism not common in the



PALAZZO SCLAFANI, PALERMO *p.* 246



PALAZZO CHIARAMONTE, PALERMO *p.* 247

later Middle Ages elsewhere, is also noticeable in the arcade of the Palazzo Chiaramonte courtyard.

The Palazzo Chiaramonte, begun in 1307, and perhaps some time a-building, to judge by the taunt conveyed in the wager aforesaid, is better preserved, far more gorgeous and exotic, all the more that the glorious golden bronze patina given by time has been spared and the old Piazza Marina converted into a sub-tropical garden famous for its tall and stately palms. (Good luck has also planted here an English tea-room with a sunny balcony affording excellent opportunities for dreamy study.)

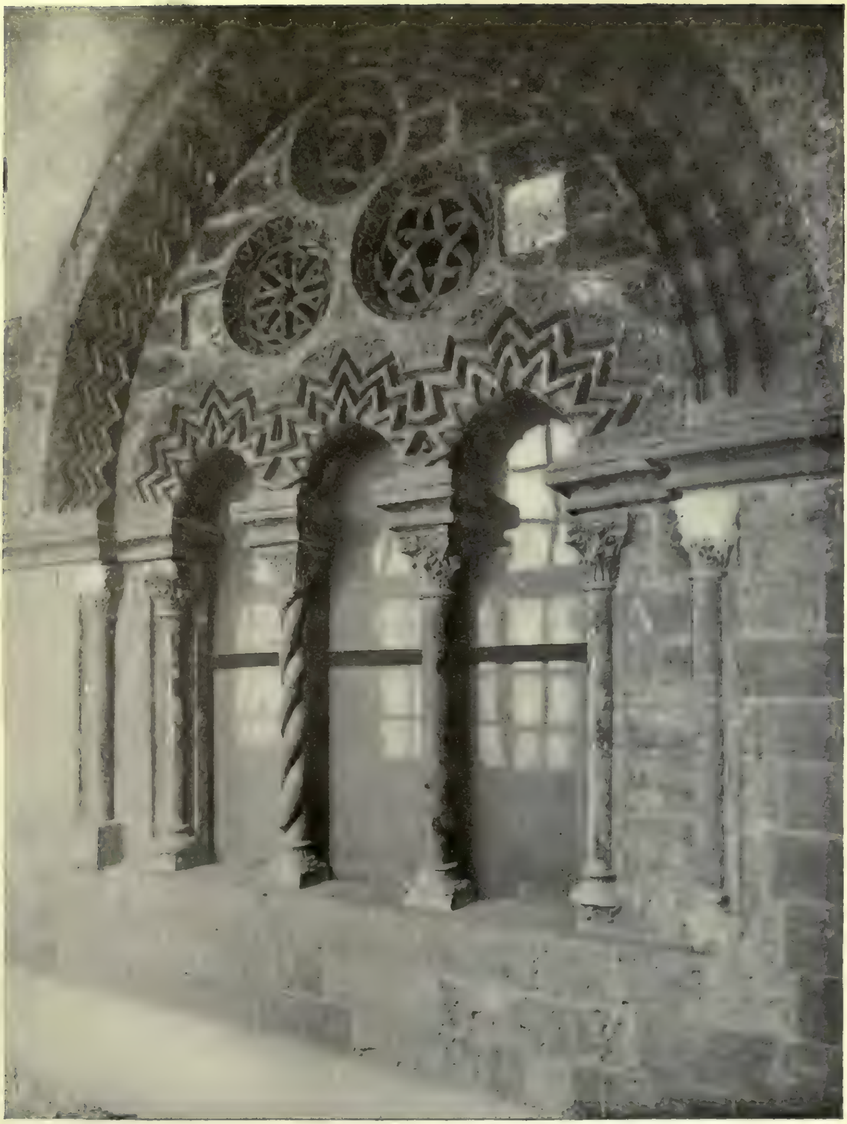
The façade of the Palazzo Chiaramonte is, however, incomplete or mutilated, and now presents an irregular appearance. It is remarkable for great height and extreme richness of decoration, combining carving with inlays in the most effective way, and varying the patterns of the inlays.

A noticeable feature are the fantastic knotted rounds of a kind of plate-tracery in the upper part of the windows, shown to great advantage in the superb window giving on the handsome arcade of the cortile, which in this case is on the top floor.

⁂

This Sicilian palace has preserved, in the great hall, a mediæval baronial ceiling, perhaps the finest and indubitably the most interesting in Europe. It is a ceiling, not an open timber roof; twenty-four cross-beams, supported on brackets, are traversed by a huge central beam, running down the whole length of the hall (metres 27.28 by 8.46). The long narrow panels between the beams, twenty-five each side, fifty in all, are subdivided into sunk compartments with splayed sunk centres, ten each side, five hundred in all. All this wood is stained dark and painted, the big beam simply; the centre left plain, a Saracenic interlocked star pattern carved in flat relief running down either side, painted in white and red with a little red scroll; all the rest profusely, with inexhaustibly varied ornament; grotesques, full of imaginative improvisation; heads in medallions; "histories" of every kind.

The sunk caissons are adorned with a floral scroll, star, or some such device, sometimes with a little centre rosette, slightly scooped out and painted red, in the Saracenic way. Own cousins to these and direct descendants of the Cappella Palatina ceiling are the stalactite brackets with inscriptions, or a floral scroll, in the hollow of the chamfer. Nor do the Saracenic survivals end here. There are star patterns in various combinations, one or two richly intricate white braid motives, and also a distinct tendency to avoid the continuous branching



WINDOW, PALAZZO CHIARAMONTE, PALERMO

Incorpora, Palermo

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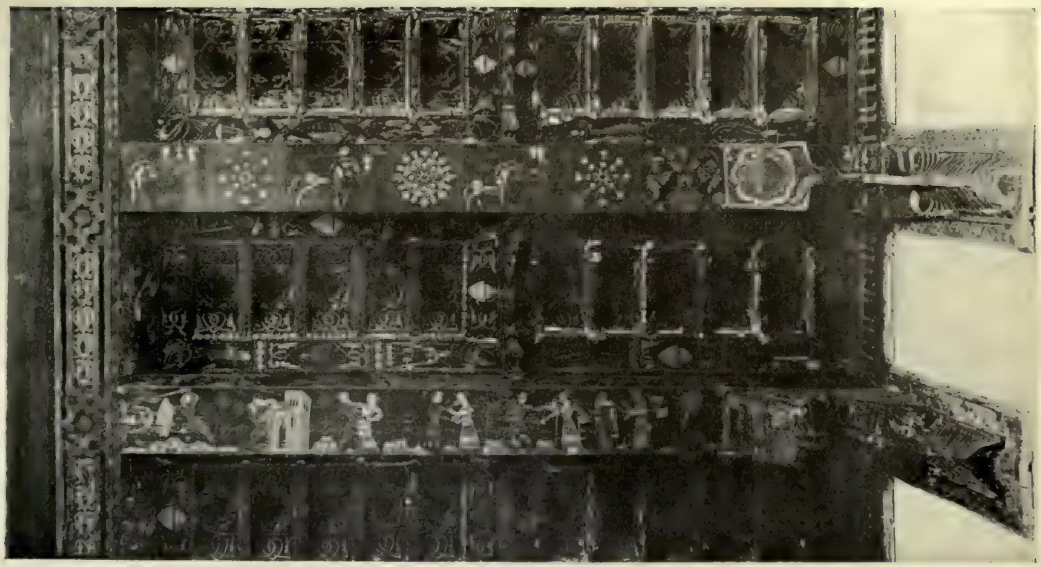
scroll of Græco-Roman-Gothic development, and make use of the Eastern arrangement in medallions with ornament between (shown, for example, in the ceiling over the aisles of the Cappella Palatina). The narrative friezes, on the other hand, are continuous, often set forth naïvely in successive scenes, with nothing but a little conventional tree in the background between them. Sometimes three love scenes, evidently connected, are separated by little squares of red, enclosing a circle with the most charming of all the many decorative devices employed ; a delicate lace-like rosette or snowflake, painted in white and red on black (dark green). On the beams a continuous story has sometimes proved too short, and the resourceful painter has filled out his space with decorative stops or ornamental fancies, or a representation of two knights jousting—which sometimes, as when it occurs after the story of Solomon's Judgment, at first complicates our reading of the story. Medallions are sometimes circular, sometimes oblong ; filled with heads, a coil of foliage, a mere little white knot of cord—rather like one of the motives of the plate tracery of the windows—grotesques of every kind, or half-length figures of fashionable youths and maidens, recalling those on early earthenware *tondi*. Detached figures, real or fantastic, also occur, painted direct on the board between two bars, in the musical sense, of ornament. One of these is the St. George. On one beam is a whole frieze of elegant devils (?); naked men with huge red wings sportively fencing with swords on a blue ground under an arcade. To all this varied wealth of motive we must add narrow borders, giving the delicacy of finish, heraldic shields used decoratively, with the coats of arms of foreign magnates or even countries, of the Norman and Aragonese dynasties, of the Chiaramonte (or Clermonts, their French ancestors, who came in with the conquerors) and of the principal Sicilian feudal nobles.

All this is painted as fancy dictated on the boards casing the beams without any unity of conception or arrangement. Where all is gay with bright colour and exuberant youthful life none is needed in narrow panels like these. The colour is polychrome, without gilding, and now very harmonious —the elegant chord, white, red and dark (greenish black), is often struck in the ornament, a gentle blue is often used for backgrounds of narrative friezes, a warm buff and a rich red for ladies' gowns.

The Sicilian masters to whom all this teeming life is due have inscribed the date in two separate inscriptions on the brackets, recording that, in the year 1377, "the present work" was begun at the bidding of Manfred Chiaramonte, and that in the

LVI



PAINTED CEILING IN THE PALAZZO CHIARAMONTE, PALERMO

p. 250.

year 1380, on July 1, *hoc opus completum est* (evidently to their own satisfaction), and put their signatures in Sicilian in two of the boards in the caissons: *Mastru Simuni pinturi di Curiglu* (Corleone), and *Mastru Chicu pinturi di Naro.* (The towns of Corleone and Naro were both part of the numerous feudal possessions of the Chiaramonte family.)

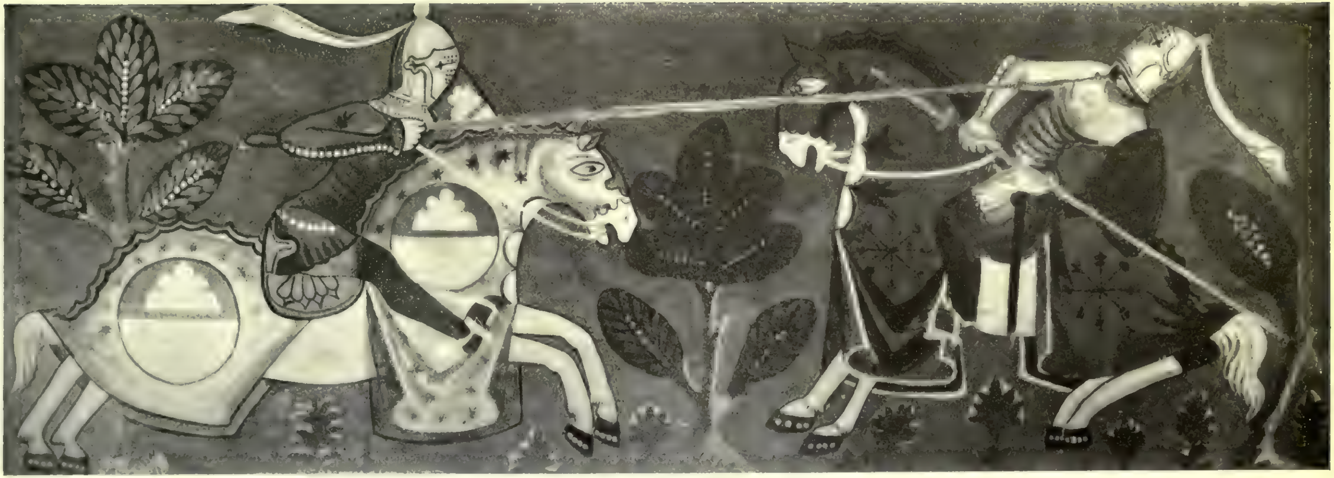
If their draughtsmanship is more spirited than elegant, or ornamentally correct, their decorative verve is, as we have seen, wellnigh inexhaustible; and alongside of this they possess the more important gift of creative and retentive imagination. There are no *clichés*, apparently, even the little heads or half-figures have the charm of improvisations or sketches, while little touches of evident observation, invaluable to the social student, abound everywhere.

Interwoven capriciously with these bright decorative fancies, there are the remarkable narrative friezes that have not yet received the attention they deserve from social or literary historians. The subjects vary. There are scenes from Bible history of a more novelistic character, such as the Judgment of Solomon, Susannah and the Elders, or Judith and Holofernes—of course frankly mediæval in character (Judith, for instance, is depicted showing Holofernes' head from the embattled walls of a toy city) so that they might as well be taken, did one not recognise certain typical incidents, for some mediæval *novella*, then current—as perhaps they were. Who shall assign a limit to the motives considered apt in those days of accomplished story-telling and insatiable listening? All was grist to the mill. Even in the collections handed down to us—which, endless as they are, can only represent part of the material floating about in the air all over Europe—one marvels at the wide range and variety of their productions and the strange tales of their wanderings and disappearances. Are there not precious fragments, lost in France, of a fine early version of the tale of Tristan, preserved in a Norse prose version of the thirteenth century, and certain remarkable late eleventh- or twelfth-century sculptures at Modena (Cathedral), representing a more primitive phase of the Breton Tales of Arthur and his knights than those known from literary sources (the versions of the *jongleurs*)? On the other hand, one of the most curious of these disappearances is the total disappearance of the Breton cycle from Sicily after it had been brought there by the first Normans and even bred a legend.

Some of these tales have had migrations as strange as the ornamental motives derived from the Far East, so often mentioned here. Indeed there is an exact parallel in the well-known story ot the "Seven Sages." Originally Indian, it travelled, by translation, by way of Persia to Syria and thence to Greece and the countries of Islam; was transformed in Byzantine times, travelled sea-borne to the seaport towns of South Italy, and spread from thence all over Western Europe. The transformation of the capital, again, might find a parallel, not entirely fanciful, in the poetic History of Alexander the Great. The first known version was a Hellenistic novel, full of Eastern marvels, written in Alexandria in the second century. It was translated into Latin in the fourth century, reduced and abbreviated (in the same way as the capitals) at the time of Charlemagne, given new life by translation into a new idiom (Dauphinois) in the twelfth century, even as the Corinthian capital was transformed when taken up by the vigorous Romanesque carvers, imitated in German, freely copied and remodelled (in the *langue d'oïl*), like the contemporary crocket capital, until, finally, a little novelistic episode, introduced by a poet about 1310–15, "Les Vœux du Paon," blossomed forth into further romantic growth, very much as the simple sprays of roses, first introduced on the capitals, blossomed forth into luxuriant trails.

It is from the copious storehouse of material of this kind, as it existed in Sicily in the fourteenth century, that Masters Simuni and Chicu have drawn, without any attempt at making, by predominance of place, any distinction between high art and decorative art, simply lavishing anywhere the images with which their memory was stored from having listened to the *contastorie* of the day on the market-place at home in Corleone or Naro ; or the scenes that had appeared to them as artists when poring over some beautiful illuminated MS. from France, owned by their wealthy patron. Other subjects were doubtless indicated by Manfred, as the work went on ; deeds of prowess of the Chiaramonte (Pl. LVI., where the victorious knight bears the coat of arms of the Chiaramonte), or personages and incidents from the tales of courtly love and fictitious adventure, in which he and his knights and ladies delighted. There still lingers an atmosphere of high romance, of baronial fine living, in this vast dusty court-room, with its inkstands and green baize, as one lingers there alone, trying to read all these stories one by one. One notices an evident delight, as on the charming contemporary French ivory mirror-cases, in prettily told love-stories, so simple and sweet that one cannot, or need not, try to derive them from any special literary sources. One of these even has the motive of the lady crowning the knight with the chaplet of roses, so often seen on the ivories.

A knight slaying a dragon and rescuing a lady



DETAIL FROM THE PAINTED CEILING OF THE PALAZZO CHIARAMONTE

The victorious knight bears the coat of arms of the Chiaramonte.

From Di Marzo Storia della Pittura in Sicilia

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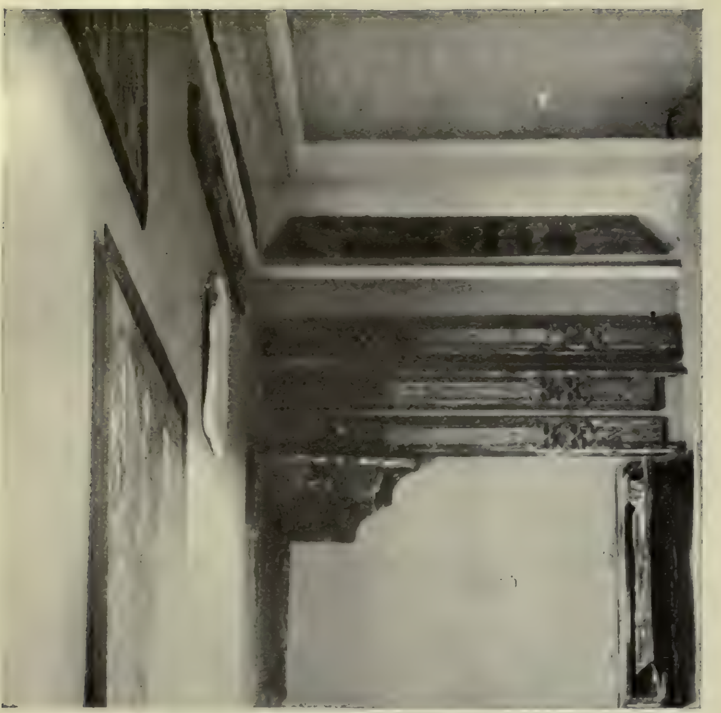
from a tower, with two more incidents of travel, and finally a wedding, might be any tale of knightly adventure, but is evidently the mediæval version of the tale of Perseus and Andromeda. One of the most curious of the Romantic tales has four personages indicated by inscriptions: "GUARNERI. KAROLUS MAGN. GUARNERIUS: DNS ROGERIUS: GUARNERIUS: MALIGN. PRODITOR. COLLOQUM (*sic*) PRODITIONIS HELENA KAROLUS MAGN. FALSA ET INIQUA PROBACIO GUARNERII: DNS ROGERIUS: NOBILIS DNA HELENA INTERFECIT GUARNERIUM: NOBILIS HELENA DECOLLAUIT GUARNERIUM." There is a certain Rogerius (of no importance), a seated king (Karolus Magn.) occurring twice, a wicked traitor Guarnerius, who slanders the noble lady Helena; she finally succeeds, however, in chopping off his head with a sword in a very resolute way.

Like the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina the painted ceiling of the Palazzo Chiaramonte may have been the finest, but was certainly not the only one of its kind. Masters such as Chicu and Simuni do not "retire" after three years of work like this. Our mentions above of the painted roofs of Cefalù, the Magione and Sto. Spirito, have shown, moreover, that there was unbroken continuity of tradition between these two remarkable ceilings, incomparable for interest and charm. Some fine and very interesting painted boards and brackets now in the museum in Palermo show that this tradition continued unbroken until the very verge of the Renaissance, and lingered long after. In the Sala Araba there are parts of a fourteenth-century roof from St. Agostino in Trapani. The paintings on the boards are here simple and more Western; long-bodied grotesques painted direct on the dark stain, on either side of a little star, but full of quaint conceits; laughing lions with conventional terminations, opposite a very much scared hare; winged mermaids; a queer woman beast with long hind legs, no forelegs, and a floriated tail. One creature has a face at the end of his tail, another a long elegant flower; there are hatted men and horned women, greyhounds, monkeys, and a grotesque boy blowing a horn. The brackets are Saracenic, cunningly fashioned into trefoiled recesses, with short stalactite terminations (*see* Pl. XI. p. 128), and lavishly painted in the style of the Chiaramonte ones; the frieze board running below them is painted with a pattern of flowers under a kind of trefoiled arcading. There is a similar one from an old house in the Via Pappagallo, and a whole collection of old brackets, mostly of the sturdy console type that one sees at Santo Spirito and in the churches of Taormina, for instance, but nearly all having some Saracenic reminiscence in the love of recessed planes and in some little



PAINTED BRACKETS AND BOARDS FROM THE CEILING IN THE PALAZZO VATTICANI (1472), PALERMO

Above, a board from the church of S. Agostino, Trapani

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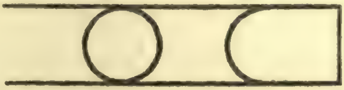
carved star or whorl on the under surfaces. Very remarkable are the long slender stalactite brackets with regular drops, more pronounced even than in the Palazzo Chiaramonte, from the Palazzo Vatticani, dated 1472. Some of the boards from this palace have the Saracenic star pattern—raised, enclosing an inscription—others painted figure subjects, for instance, of nude children, where Renaissance feeling creeps in. Still later are the brackets and parts of a timber ceiling now hidden by a vaulted ceiling in one of the large halls of the Palazzo Aiutamicristo, built in the fine free Sicilian transitional style—that has so much in common with the contemporary French transitional style—in 1490 by Matteo Carnevalieri.

* * *

It belongs to the joys of Palermo, after studies such as these, to come home from a walk towards evening and see one of the big cows that are standing waiting to be milked, wearing a collar of bent wood painted with a design that may be expressed diagrammatically thus (*cf.* Pl. LXXIII.) :



A blue star on a white ground is here separated by a sprawly floral scroll on bright yellow from an oblong medallion, containing the gaily attired figures of the Madonna and Child under a bright blue curtain. An equally diagrammatical representation of the scheme of the paintings on the lean-to ceilings over the side aisles of the Cappella Palatina would show an exactly similar arrangement, though, it must be admitted, with somewhat more refinement of style.

In this connection also, I wish to mention the interesting "drawn work," which if not exclusively Sicilian is yet distinctively so, and other fine forms of fair handiwork on linen—of which a few rare pieces have survived. Beautiful and ingenious in workmanship—which consists, in the drawn work, in drawing the threads of the loose linen web together between the figures (left plain) into a kind of mesh, whipped over with coloured silks or fine linen thread, and in the embroidery in padding the outlined figures slightly at the back so as to give an effect of *repoussé*—these coverlets or curtains are delightful in pattern, fanciful and romantic and as remarkable in their way as the Chiaramonte ceiling, as a record of the day when all the world was young, when tales of chivalry and adventure were in the air, and ladies wrought fantastic griffins, representations of knights jousting, and even of scenes and figures from the *chansons de geste* then still in vogue, on to the show pieces of their fine bed-linen.

There is at South Kensington a precious coverlet dating from about A.D. 1400,* very remarkable in this respect. The scenes are taken from the story of Tristan (" Mort d'Arthur "). There is a description of each, in a Sicilian dialect, worked in. According to Dr. Pitrè the legends refer to the headings of chapters of some version of the Tales, then current in Sicily.

Now this is all the more remarkable that this is one of the last surviving records of the popularity of these tales in Sicily, which, after once having struck root there, and flourished exceedingly, after a while disappeared entirely, as mentioned above (p. 252).

Brought to Southern Italy and Sicily, according to Gaston Paris and Dr. Pitrè,† by the first Normans, who brought their tales and their minstrels with them, kept fresh, maybe, by Norman *jongleurs* flocking to the renowned court of Norman Palermo, these tales were rapidly acclimatised, so that Gervase of Tilbury was told when at the court of William II., that King Arthur was really still alive, living in a palace of marvellous workmanship (*miro opere*) on (or in ?) the Mongibello (Etna), where he had been seen reclining in royal state, by a groom of the bishop of Catania who had strayed there in pursuit of a runaway horse. The horse was found for him, and he was bidden tell the bishop, from the king, that he was still living after a long sojourn in the forest. A similar legend is told by the German chronicler, Cesar of Heisterbach. In an Italian poem of about A.D. 1200, the author, one Gatto Lupesco, tells how he meets two knights from Brittany who have come back from Mongibello after a long stay there :

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* A companion piece is said to exist in Florence, *vide* the forthcoming volume on "I Merletti Siciliani," by the Signora Bonetti-Vertua. I regret extremely that I have not even had an opportunity of seeing the proofs of this interesting work, for which the author has obtained access to some of the jealously guarded treasures of the Museum of Palermo.

† *Vide* the fine historic essay on the "Tradizionie cavalleresche in Sicilia" in the "Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari."

Cavalieri siamo di Bretagna
ke vegnamo de la montagna
ke ll'omo apella Mongibello,
assai vi semo stati ad ostello,

hoping to learn the truth about their lost king.

Yet in the course of the fifteenth century, these Breton tales seem to disappear entirely, ousted by the Charlemagne cycle merging into the Reali di Francia which survive to this day (*vide* chapter xiv.). Charlemagne occurs, as we have seen, in the paintings of the Chiaramonte ceiling.

CHAPTER XII

MEDIÆVAL PALERMO *

All mediæval cities that have been allowed to retain the vital parts, if not all, of their old organism or physiognomy, have a curious living charm, due to spontaneous growth, as of something alive, very different in its effect from the sense of admiration and a certain well-being inspired by noble and well-considered old Classical and Renaissance planning.

This is specially true of Palermo. And the charm makes itself felt all the more strongly when it happens that this mediæval physiognomy wears, as it were, a baffling handsome lace mask of Spanish baroque and rococo, with more than a hint of Claude in the picture presented by the open arch of the Porta Felice with its tall useless columns, and the glittering glamour of harbour and sea beyond ; with Spanish reminiscences in mysterious

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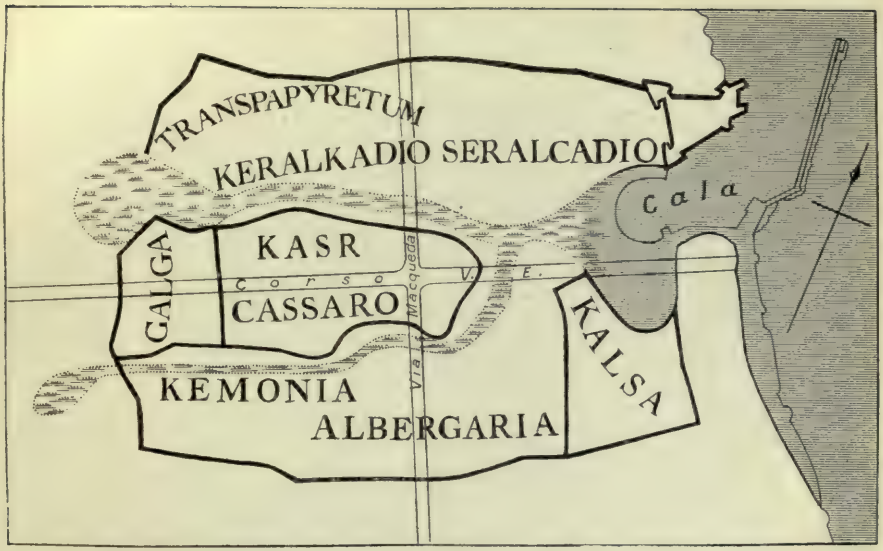
* Written from observations taken in 1905–1908, before the havoc wrought by the completion of the Via Roma in the lie of the land between the Piazza Caracciolo and the Piazza Nuova.

side streets, whitewashed and gravely somnolent with their tall stretches of almost windowless walls, as in green-tiled or yellow-tiled cupolas, bulging wrought-iron balconies, palace fronts, richly patterned in exuberant stucco, or superb courtyards of dingy splendour. Indeed, Palermo is one of the cities where stately planning can be really enjoyed, in the seventeenth-century creation of the Via Maqueda and prolongation of the Via Toledo (Corso).

But the mediæval monuments hide themselves away out of sight. There is no Town Hall, no Piazza dei Signori, still the living heart and active pulse of the old cities of republican origin ; there are no old streets still lined with mediæval brick palaces. There is none of this in Palermo ; but those who prowl will soon—without any preceding knowledge of ibn Hauqal, or the ponderous volumes of Di Giovanni—recognise the old type, read the old plan as one reads a palimpsest incompletely effaced and shining through everywhere. A stray mention found in a guide-book after some of this prowling of the site of the old Bab-el-Bahr, or Sea Gate, will be enough to give the clue, and allow one to recognise a most interesting manifestation of the monarchical or feudal city type, having a fortified inner city, with a citadel (arx) and castle at the upper end, quite


TRANSPAPYRETUM
KERALKADIO SERALCADIO
Cala
KASR
Corso V. E.
CASSARO
GALGA
Via Macqueda
KALSA
KEMONIA
ALBERGARIA

MEDIÆVAL PALERMO, AFTER DI GIOVANNI

The lines of the present Via Macqueda and Corso Vittorio Emanuele, also of the present water front, are given for comparison.

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evidently a city within a city; surrounded by suburbs enclosed at different dates by outer walls, some ancient or mediæval with one or two pretty fourteenth-century gates; others later with handsome late Renaissance monumental gates, like the Porta Nuova—or fantastic baroque structures that are not even gateways, but huge gateposts. Yet, handsome Renaissance or fantastic baroque, still surged round by a picturesque motley street life that is still in many ways full of mediæval survivals.

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Following Hugh Falcandus, Mediæval Palermo may be described as consisting of three cities: a fortified inner city—the Qasr, or Kasr, or Cassaro (Arabic for castle, citadel)—in the middle, occupying the promontory of rising ground between two rivers, and two Borghi or populous quarters, the Transpapyretum or Seralcadio to the north, and the Kemonia, the old Neapolis, to the south, which by degrees swallowed up the Halisah or Kalsa, the old official residence of the Arab emirs, on its eminence at the mouth of the harbour.

The upper part of this Cassaro, answering probably to the Roman Arx, known as the Halka, Galga (later the Plano di lo Palaczo), stretched straight across the top of the Cassaro hill from the height overlooking the convents and gardens of the Kemonia to the escarpment above the Papyretus (Papyrus swamp) to the north, where part of the old wall is still standing, as also portions of it running along above the line of the present Corso Alberto Amadeo. The whole south-west angle was occupied, as it still is, by the huge block of the castle.

In Norman times there was also a wall, thrown down at some time in the thirteenth century, between the Galga and the city, running across in a straight line from the angle of the Palazzo Sclafani (built in the fourteenth century after the walls were pulled down) to the Porta Copertæ, or Coperti, in or near the belfry tower, opposite the cathedral, originally the means of communication between the cathedral and the Galga, and (by means of the Via Coperta, or "Covered Way" mentioned by Hugh Falcandus) also the palace. There were six gates to the Halka—one of these the Castle Gate mentioned by ibn Jubair.

The Galga was probably the old Roman Forum. One of the finest mosaics there are anywhere has been found there. Some of these ancient buildings were appropriated by the mediæval folk, in their free and easy way, first as assembly halls, later as quarries, such as the mysterious Aula Regia (later Sala Viridis), considered somehow as part of the palace, mentioned by Hugh Falcandus in his History as *conjuncta palatio* (below) and so large that William I. came down from the palace and showed himself there in public to the multitude, after the tumults of 1161, and described by ibn Jubair (*cf.* p. 65) in a famous passage, now baffling all reconstruction, yet conveying a fine idea of mediæval magnificence and picturesque ease of adaptation. A Roman basilica (if it was one) with Saracenic belvederes so lofty that even an Arab traveller "wondered at their height";—and this building used as a mediæval great hall where the king dined in state on great occasions, and where between whiles all the patriarchal business of all early mediæval kings' courts—doubly picturesque in this semi-Oriental capital—was transacted on "raised benches" under an arcade by the king's "officers, commissioners and servants"—as described by ibn Jubair. . . .

In 1283 Queen Constance of Aragon held some kind of an assembly there, when seats were provided for her, the princes, magnates, and knights; and the smaller fry sat "on the ground, on arras spread out for them." It was then known as the Sala Viridis, presumably from the grass that grew there. It finally disappeared in the sixteenth century after the *timber roof* had long been unsafe. It could not therefore have been an amphitheatre.

The later name of theatre, which has given rise to some confusion, probably rose from the fact that it was, according to contemporary evidence, "used as a theatre" in its dismantled state in the sixteenth century. Di Giovanni considers that it was a large basilica. Another mysterious classical building, probably a temple, was the church of Santa Maria della Pinta, demolished with the Via Coperta and other buildings in the way, to make room for the prolongation of the Via Toledo (Via Marmorea) to the Piazza Nuova in 1648. The site is still quite easily determined by certain humps or knobs in the ground.*

Beside the Santa Maria della Pinta, there were churches galore in the old mediæval Galga, or Plano di lo Palaczo, in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century records; quite a prodigious number of churches, nestling among walls, vineyards, *chirbe*, or small house-plots planted with trees, stone huts and ruined houses, tanks and conduits for irrigation: churches and convents to saints, male and female, Latin or Greek, the Greek ones often with domes coloured red by the watertight red cement used. One of these, San Giacomo la Mazara, picturesquely situated on a steep bluff overlooking the Papyretus, is known to have had a dome and to have been one of the gems now, alas, lost, of the Rogerian reign. Part of the old tower was still standing, used for a stable among the buildings of the barracks, about fifty years ago, when Amari transcribed the early twelfth-century Arabic inscription over the doorway. Of all these churches there is only one still *in situ*, the little interesting Greek church described above of Santa Maria Maddalena, once domed.

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* Was, until 1910, when they were covered up by a neat little public garden.

It is not now easy to place the much-discussed covered way (Via Coperta), described by Hugh Falcandus as leading from the palace to the cathedral. It must have been there since it is described by such keen and admirable observers as ibn Jubair and Falcandus, but all we know about the line it followed is the fact that it could not very well have been as has been suggested, a cryptoporticus passage in the city wall itself, as a certain little house is described in a deed of sale of 1237 as "situated *between* the Porta Coperti to the east, the Magna Ruga Coperta to the south, on to which it has free entrance and exit, and to the north the walls of the city, on to which it has windows looking over the Piperium (Papyretum) and the *via* (road or street) leading to the Porta Rota."

⁂

The three principal streets mentioned by Hugh Falcandus, corresponding to the three *contrade* of Edrisi, which connected the Galga with the Foro Saracenorum in front of, or at ("juxta" says Hugh Falcandus), the Bab-el-Bahr, or old Saracenic Sea Gate at the lower end of the Cassaro, can still easily be traced.

The present Corso Vittorio Emmanuele, the *ci-devant* Via Toledo, still called by old people the Cassaro, indeed corresponds exactly, from the remains of the church of la Pinta to the Piazzetta Sant' Antonio, with the old Via Marmorea, paved with red marble, this superb Platea Magna or Cassaro, with the palaces described by Edrisi, churches then as now, and magnificent much-lauded shops of the Eastern type which had given it its Arabic name of As Simat, or the Row. There are a few shops of this type—in a later version—still remaining in the Corso and elsewhere in Palermo, having a solid stone counter towards the street, separated by a little column from the narrow entrance way without a visible door.*

These shops had painted signs, as proved by a deed of sale of 1186 in which a *flebotomo* (barbersurgeon) is mentioned as selling his house called *lo svenato*,* or the man with his veins opened. In the first half of the nineteenth century the barbers still displayed signs showing a man being bled with a huge jet of blood spurting lustily out of his arms and legs. The two instances provide in a nutshell a good example of continuity of custom.

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* In the Museum (upstairs) there is a pretty eighteenth-century water-colour showing a whole street of shops of the kind in graceful Renaissance architecture.

In Mediæval Palermo as now, there was a great number of churches all down the main street. There was a whole little brood of tiny churches sheltering like chickens under the wings of the cathedral in *lo plano di la majuri Ecclesia*. Opposite the cathedral, on the Greek side of the Via Marmorea, there was the Basilian nunnery of San Salvatore, of which part of a wall still remains *in situ*.

It would seem that the Via Marmorea was, in Norman times, the dividing-line between the two main divisions (nationalities or creeds ?) of the inhabitants, that the Greek population lived on the southern side of the Via Marmorea while the Latin population kept to the north side. Di Giovanni has at least drawn this inference from noticing that the names of the churches in mediæval records are mainly Greek with a very few exceptions on the south side, while Latin saints predominate on the north or cathedral side. The Greek creed and the Greek language gradually fell into disuse, but a certain "regional" feeling of dislike—not unknown in Palermo to this day—probably lingered long and it is not likely that intermarriages were frequent.

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* In the Italian transcripts. I have not seen the Latin original. This notice is kindly communicated by Dr. Pitrè.

Among these Greek and Latin inhabitants of the Cassaro there was a fair sprinkling of Mohammedans, and a considerable one of Jews. There was at least one mosque in the Via Marmorea, and another, the Mosque of Sipene or Saban, nestling under the inner wall between the Galga and the Cassaro. The Jews lived scattered in little colonies round their synagogues all over the Cassaro, but especially in the net-work of alleys round the Ruga fornace Balnei Johar (or de Auro = the "Golden Bath"; this Ruga is the present Via Ragusa). Some kept baths, others were "doctors of medicine"; in 1337, *i.e.* after the formal expulsion of the Jews from the Cassaro, a licence is granted to Master Solomon the Jew to exercise the profession of medicine after due examination before the Prætor by specially appointed doctors, and oath taken by the Jewish law. There must have been a good many Jews in the Cassaro in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. After they were driven out of it in 1303 (by an edict of Frederick II.) and forced for a while to live in the Ghetto lower down, the

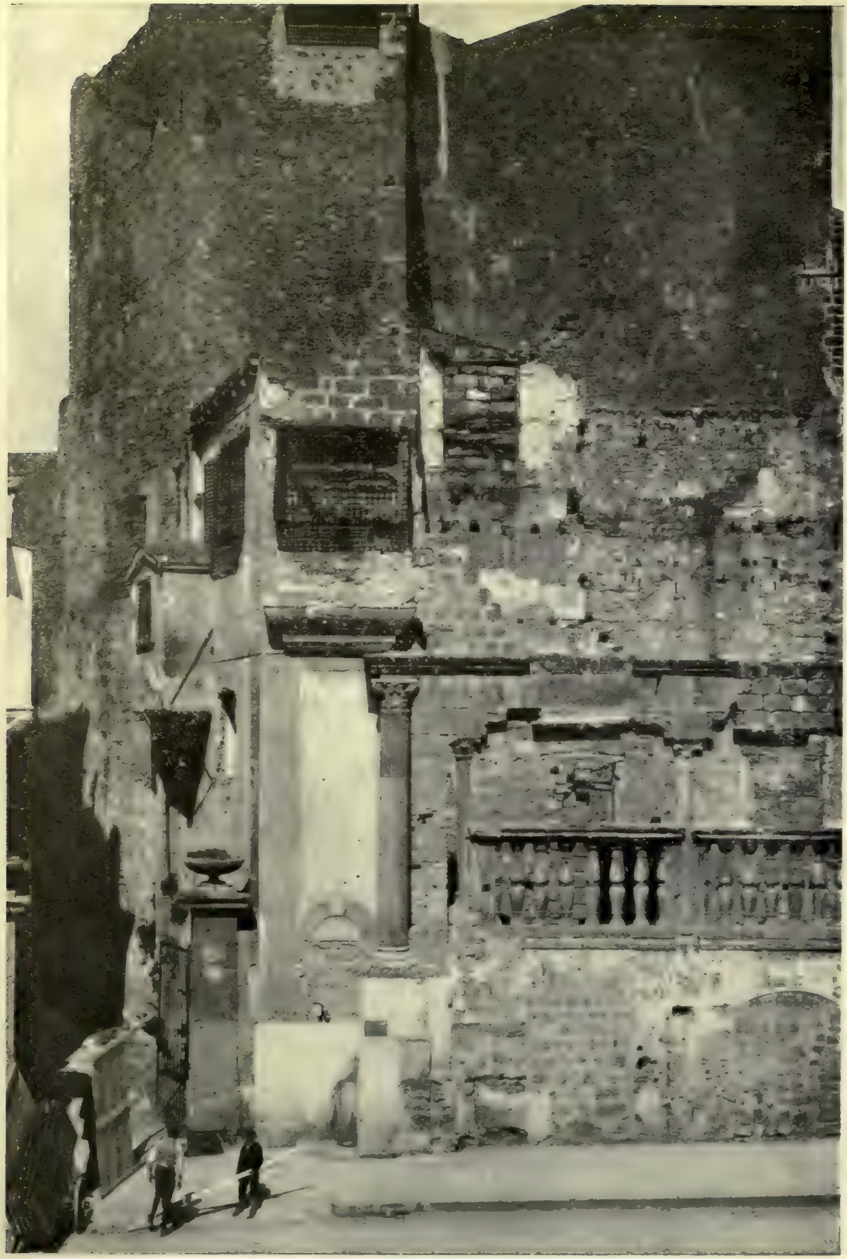
Cassaro became so depopulated that the king was petitioned in 1312, by the "University" (township) of Palermo, for leave to call in men from other parts of Sicily. There are always exceptions to rules, evasion of laws of this kind, however. There was Master Solomon the leech aforesaid; in 1424 a house is described as *prope balneum quod tenet Galluf coynus Judæus.*

The baths mentioned by Edrisi thus continued a feature, if not "in great number," of Mediæval Palermo, more than a century after the last remnant of Arabs, or rather Mohammedans, had been driven out of the island and deported to Lucera (1301). There was long one of these baths in the *plano* of the cathedral. The last mention of the Golden Baths I have been able to find is from 1348.

Before the expulsion of the Jews, there do not seem to have been many vineyards, gardens (orchards) or empty lots in the Cassaro; after that mentions of them occur in deeds. One record shows that Mediæval Palermo was not lacking in one characteristic feature of Southern mediæval towns. In 1436 Giovanni di Calvello was granted permission to enclose the (Roman) theatre "belonging to" his houses (on the present site of the Monastery of Monte Vergine).

But we must not lose sight of Hugh Falcandus' main streets, still easily followed, and affording rare opportunities for the fascinating pursuit of reconstructive topography.

Beginning at the Porta Coperti opposite the cathedral, his Via Sinistra can be traced as running between the cathedral and the original archbishop's palace with the chapel of the Incoronata. Two of the old towers of this palace (Pl. LIX.) are still standing among the ruins at the back of the chapel and porch of the Incoronata. (One point here is difficult to determine. In Norman and Aragonese times there must have been some kind of irregular open space below this Incoronata porch—or else where did the people assemble to see the newly crowned kings in the porch? On the top of the walls of the Galga opposite?) In the fifteenth century, when the kings of the two Sicilies were no longer crowned in Palermo, and the archbishop's palace had been moved to where it is now, this porch was used by the gentry of Palermo as a belvedere or promenade for enjoying the view over the Papyretum, a kind of swampy lake full of papyrus reeds and abounding in waterfowl. After passing the little Cistercian church of Santa Cristina, built by Gualtiero Offamilio, the old street line now disappears among the buildings of the Palazzo Artale, but reappears again in front of the church of Santa Agata la Guilla or la Guidda. Here was the *Trivium* between the church and the



THE LOGGIA DELL' INCORONATA *p.* 272

gate of that name, mentioned by Hugh Falcandus, where Majone of Bari was assassinated in 1161. From the Piazza Santa Agata onwards the present Via del Celso represents the old Shera Cancellaria. A Shera or Xera was a kind of boulevard running along the top of the city wall, with palaces on the outer side. Passing by or near the Greek church of San Giorgio lo Xueri (which in the seventeenth century still had fine mosaics), by palaces and towers (one of them, after 1270 or so, the beautiful palace of the Fleur-de-lys mentioned above, another the palace of Majone of Bari), this Shera merged into the Piazza del Cancelliere—with the palace of the great Chancellor Matteo d'Ajello, the convent of the Benedictine nuns, Santa Maria di Latinis, founded by him in 1171, a little garden behind the apse of the convent and a bake-house (*furnus*) given to the convent with a shop for the sale of bread—and continued in a beautiful straight line high up above the present level of the Via Macqueda to the very ancient church and convent of San Teodoro on the heights above the Gate and Fountain of Health (Bab-as-Saafa). In this church, now the Monastero delle Vergini, some interesting Saracenic columns may still be seen. (Di Giovanni supposes this church of San Teodoro to have been a mosque.) After that the street ran down hill—after 1330 or so past the now so-called *Case normanne* to the Foro Saracenorum, the open place in front of the old Sea Gate, the exact site and extent of which place it is not now easy to determine. All we know for certain is that part of it is represented by the present Piazzetta di Sant' Antonio.*

The line of Hugh Falcandus' Via Dextra, though quite easily traced, is somewhat more obliterated by the pulling down of walls and other alterations. It can be followed, however, along the line of the Via dei Biscottari, where the position of the old tower now known as the Palazzo del Conte Federigo, when seen from below, as already mentioned, gives a very fair notion of one of these palace towers rising up from the steep slope above the river. It reappears again in the street running down to the Piazza Bologni in front of the charming little mediæval Palazzo Raffadali, formerly Speciali, where it is said that the old wall can be seen among the terraces and gardens at the back of the palace.

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* Siragusa, the editor of the latest edition of Hugh Falcandus' *Epistola* (1897), considers it as stretching straight across from the Sta. Maria dell Ammiraglio to the Monastero delle Vergini. There are several difficulties connected with the old level of the ground here, and the respective relations of the Bab-el-Bahr or Bebil bachal, the Porta Patitellorum, and the church of Sant' Antonio, which can only be solved by expert examination of the alterations due to the later prolongation of the Via Toledo (the Corso) from the Piazzetta Sant' Antonio to the sea. It should be borne in mind also when studying the old Via Marmorea, that the lower part of it from the present Piazza Bologni to the Piazzetta Sant' Antonio was levelled in 1600 when the Via Macqueda was laid out.

This part was known as the Serabuali, a corruption of the Shera of Abu Ali ; it continued in a grand sweep high up above the little river and the present level (now the University) down to the fascinating tangle of palaces, chapels, convents, campaniles, alleys and gardens on the south-east corner of the city walls, still represented by the Marturanu house with the two well-known churches,* whence the wall and street bent sharply and ran down to the Bab-el-Bahr.

There is no express mention of a *Shera* here, only, somewhat later, of a *Plano* di San Cataldo. Houses, private chapels, convents, even a garden belonging to the monastery of Monreale and a shop (*apotheca*) belonging to the Marturanu houses, were huddled close together in true Oriental fashion, with tiny alleys or blind alleys between them. There were the houses of Silvestro, Count of Marsico (formerly belonging to Majone of Bari) with the private chapel of San Cataldo, where he buried a daughter in 1161; the house of Pagano de Parisio, Count of Alife and Butera, with the chapel of St. Simon ; the houses of the wealthy

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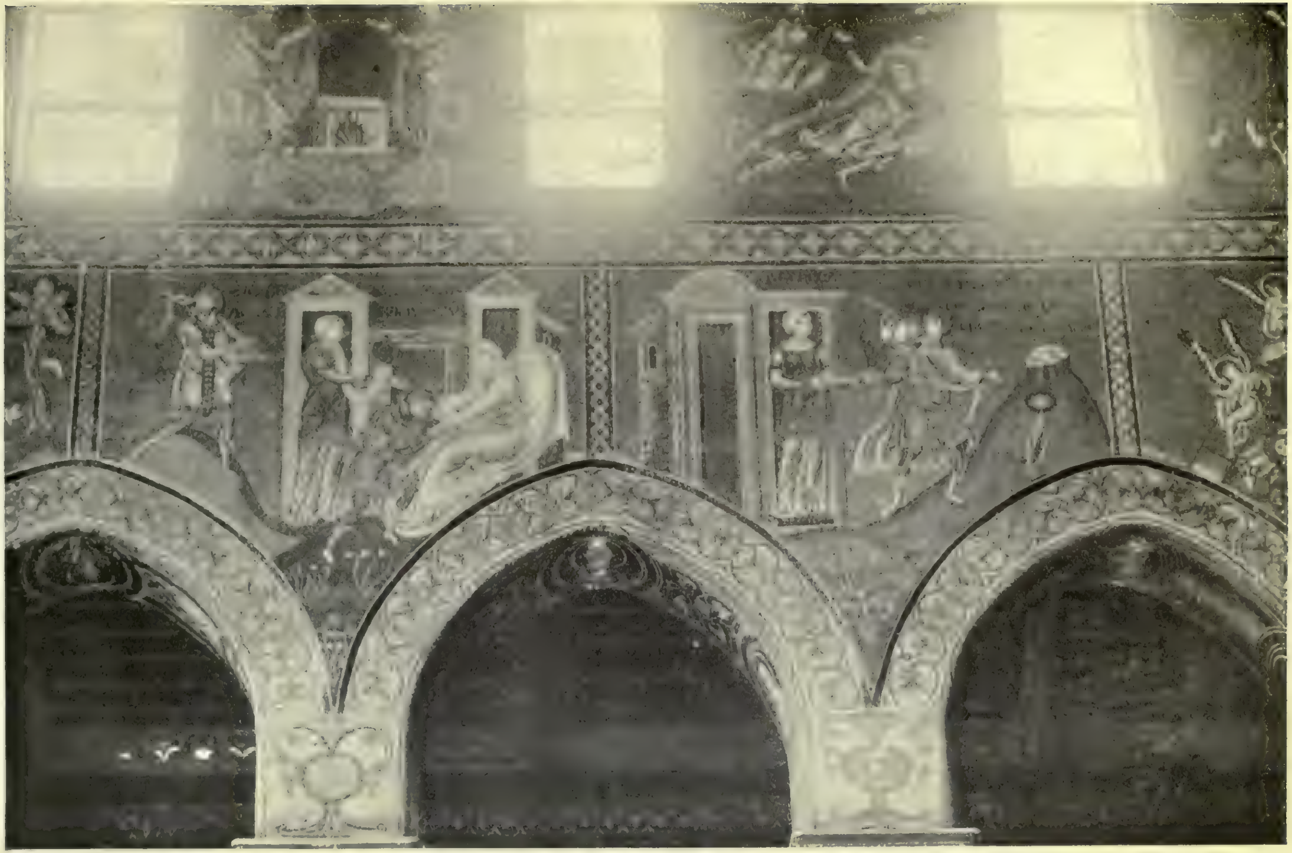
* Now raised up high above the level of the present Piazza Bellini. The level of the ground has here been lowered twice : once in 1600 and once in the nineteenth century.

Lady Zoë ; the lovely house belonging to Goffredo and Aloysia Marturanu—still partly preserved (Pl. X.), a precious testimony to the Oriental refinement of this whole group of houses—akin to the charming abodes suggested by the columns and cortili still found scattered about Ravello.

This corner of the walls was evidently a fashionable quarter in the twelfth century ; does not ibn Jubair tell us that the ladies of Palermo, resembling Muslim women in dress and bearing, congregated to the church of the Antiochene on Christmas Day, dressed in gowns of silk mixed with gold, elegant mantles and veils of various colours ? And do not the genre pictures on a large scale, ostensibly representing scenes from Old Testament history, done in mosaic on the walls of the nave in the Cathedral of Monreale, help to give us a sumptuous idea of the gorgeous semi-Oriental raiment of these fashionable twelfth-century ladies ? On one of the two panels chosen for illustration, Rebecca wears a white robe or gown with long sleeves, wrinkled and tight-fitting and trimmed with two rich borders of gold embroidery ; over this a sleeveless tunic of a warm brown with a deep hem, studded with gems, round her neck and at her knees. Round her head and neck she has wound a long gauze scarf or veil with gold embroidery in elegant circles and borders, just the kind of thing that one can imagine as



MOSAICS IN THE NAVE, CATHEDRAL, MONREALE
Scenes from the story of Jacob and Esau.

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brought out of the coffers in the tempting shops of the Vicus Amalfitanorum.

In the second picture she wears a kerchief, also embroidered, tightly folded and tied back, with one flap hanging down over her neck in front—as elderly peasant women in the Conca d'Oro still wear their kerchiefs (*cf.* Pl. VI. p. 82). As Rebecca's tunic is here simpler, perhaps we may infer that this was the workaday garb of the Palermitan housewives.

Another of the Monreale panels shows the mantle Rebecca wore when travelling on muleback seated sedately in a "Spanish" saddle. It is full and ample, drawn together into a large round brooch or buckle in front—and not pulled up over her head, which is covered with a kerchief.

But to return to our topographical exploration of the Marturanu quarter. There must also have been a house or convent appropriated to the use of the Basilian nuns, whom Giorgios from Antioch in 1143 endowed with the splendid chapel known all through the Middle Ages as Santa Maria de Admiratu. His own house was close by; farther on there was the house of another admiral (Eugenio) with the chapel of San Stephano and some more houses, after 1311–12 the convent of Santa Caterina. A long piece of the old wall can here still be seen from the Via degli

Schioppettieri (formerly Balestrieri) and nothing gives a more mediæval impression than this now so quiet street, evoking memories of first crossbow-makers (*balestrieri*) and later musket-makers (*schioppettieri*), running along onesided at the foot of the walls, which are here indeed, as Hugh Falcandus calls them, of prodigious height.*

It would almost seem as if fashion forsook this part of the Cassaro towards the end of the twelfth century. At least we find Goffredo de Marturanu and Aloysia his wife founding a convent of Benedictine nuns in their houses in 1194. In 1195 Count Pagano di Parisio follows suit and gives "for the completion of the said convent—the chapel of St. Simon built by him with an adjacent little house." The Benedictine nunnery thus had two small chapels, St. Simon and Santa Maria de Martoranu, both distinct from Santa Maria de Admiratu until 1433, when this latter church was granted to the "Martorana" nuns by King Alfonso, and the smaller Santa Maria de Martoranu disappears from the records (parts of the old tower

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* There are thus parts of this old inner wall still visible in at least three places ; in the Via degli Schioppettieri, in the Via dei Candelai, and in two places at the north-west corner of the Galga. In other places the line of these walls can still easily be traced by the difference in the level of the ground and the steep and picturesque Salite, such as the Salita Raffadali and the Salita Artale. Most of the pulling down was done early in the fourteenth century.

OLD CITY WALL IN THE VIA
DEGLI SCHIOPPETTIERI
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GIARRA AND OLD CITY WALL
NEAR THE PORTA OSSUNA
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and church were discovered in 1866), while St. Simon becomes one of the chapels of Santa Maria de Admiratu, which gradually came to be known as the Martorana.

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There are now no vestiges of importance of the ten or more fortified gates studding* the walls of the inner city, which must have contributed to render the aspect of early Mediæval Palermo more than ordinarily picturesque, owing to the considerable difference in level between the inner or upper, and the outer city. Part of the fortifications of the old Sea Gate (Bab-el-Bahr, later Bebilbachal), known as the Tower of Baich, were still standing in the sixteenth century, when they were seen by that delightful person Tommaso Fazello. It was then still entire and "one could live there, and on the front there were all round certain carved letters, but he who lived there wanting to repair his house moved them and broke some of them." Fazello saw it being done and after bitterly reproaching first the masons and then the owner, tried in vain to stir up the Senate, saying that it was "inconceivable that they should consent to the loss of such an old memorial of the city, the which it would be impossible to make good"—and drew the letters himself.

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* An arch said to be part of the old Porta Patitellorum is still to be seen in the courtyard of a house in the Via dei Formai.

Farther northwards Fazello saw and described "another tower called the Favat, stretching from the Porta Patitelli to the corner of the church of Sant' Antonio, which stands above the fountain which with a Saracenic name is called Jarafi" (now Garraffo).

These two towers were probably, at least in Norman times, part of the same large fortified Gate stretching straight across the extreme east point of the inner city, and including the church of Sant' Antonio which was always "in Cassaro." This seems at least the only reasonable explanation of the gradual confusion of the Bab-el-Bahr, situated, according to Hugh Falcandus, at, not near, the lower end of the Via Marmorea, with the Porta Patitellorum, opening on to the present Via dei Formai, or Lastmakers' Street, another little humble street sidling along under the walls. Originally, perhaps, a postern, according to a suggestion thrown by Di Giovanni in his haphazard way, the Porta Patitellorum would by degrees, as it and the quarter outside it grew in importance, give its name to the whole Gate. It acquired this name from the makers of *patitelli* (clogs: shoes with wooden soles and a leather toe-piece), who congregated under its "long dark arches." Clogs being no longer worn, lasts are still made in Lastmakers' Alley—or were in 1908.

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It used to be believed on learned but quite insufficient grounds, that the Cassaro was once embraced by two arms of the sea running up as far as the Papireto to the north and to the south at least as far as the present Casa Professa, if not all the way up the present Via Porta di Castro. Some old maps in the Museum evoke a most romantic idea of a fortified little city on a spit of land between two long arms of the sea. Unfortunately the publication of the description of Palermo by ibn Hauqal has proved that in A.D. 973 there was already a river running down from the Papireto between the Cassaro and the quarter known as Saqalibah opposite, and populous thriving quarters on the supposed site of the arm of the sea to the south of the Cassaro. All he says about the sea is that the Bab-el-Bahr or Sea Gate was "near the sea."

What this means exactly it is not now easy to determine, and unnecessary to try to discuss here. All we know is that when Hugh Falcandus wrote, two centuries later, there was no sea even near the Bab-el-Bahr, the quarters to the north and east of this gate being, instead, one of the important centres of trade and commerce, containing the wealthy and sumptuous Vicus Amalfitanorum.

The basin of the Cala (Port) was much wider in the early Middle Ages than it became later, extending over the whole of the present Piazza Marina. Edrisi, writing in King Roger's time, mentions a Bab-el-Bahr or Sea Gate in the walls of the Halesah (Kalsa) "where was the arsenal in Arabic times." There is another mention in 1306 of a Sea Gate (Porta Maris) which would correspond exactly to the above, in the deed of sale to Giovanni Chiaramonte of the site of the present Palazzo Chiaramonte, situated *juxta portan maris* (which was thus still standing) and bounded on one side by the *platea dictæ maritima* (which was thus already high and dry).

A brief mention must be made here of the course of the two little rivers which to ancient Palermo, as to modern Chartres, gave so much of its peculiar physiognomy. The more important of the two was the river Rutah or Papyretus, coming from the vast Papyrus swamp (drained dry in the sixteenth century) so often mentioned here, and running merrily down past the mill *ad molendas cannamellas* outside the Porta St. Agata la Guilla, and a whole row of other mills for grinding sugar-cane, or corn; past sedgy banks, waste places piled with refuse, side by side with gardens, a large tank or fountain from an abundant well-spring; across the present Piazza Onofrio, under a stone bridge called Cantariddoheb (Golden ?), and thence downhill across the Piazza Conciaria (tannery; the present Piazza Nuova) to the Buccheria, past the Ayn Saafa, or Fountain of Health below the Bab as Saafa, later the Porta Oscura, on the heights somewhere near the Monastero delle Vergini. In the thirteenth century there was still a mosque here in connection with this Fountain or Pool of Health, where a pious Muslim traveller, Al Hawari, regained his health in 1215. The Buccheria, or *Macellum vetus*, is still represented by the Piazza Caracciolo, five years ago (1905), in spite of the vulgar assertiveness of the Via Roma, still one of the most picturesque markets in Europe, with a square of broken, irregular old stone booths, with odd shaped awnings, in the now empty space round the fountain (Fazello's Jarafi). A row of these open shops still remain, built into the old wall below Sant' Antonio and running down eastwards to the Argenteria, real old open shops, some with very fine old tiles (one with a whole picture front representing two white bulls) and queer shabby terraces on top, where one can study survivals, if one has a mind, as represented by a dish of *maccheroni alle sarde* from the cookshop below.

We know less about the river after leaving the Buccheria except the fact that there was another mill, not far from the sea, in the Plano di S. Giacomo, or Jacopo, de Maritima. There was also a fondak for travellers here, as early as 1143.

The Kemonia river (later known as the Torrente di Cannizzaro or even Fiume di Maltempo) was smaller, less useful and indeed rather apt to overflow, until it was finally drained off after a big inundation in 1571. The old course is marked by the present Via del Castro and further down by the Via del Ponticello, where a little stone bridge survived as late as the seventeenth century. This region was mentioned as muddy and marshy as early as 1196; in later mediæval deeds the lower part of the river is frequently mentioned as "underground."

⁂

The outer city was also enclosed by walls; the old Neapolis or Southern Borgo early, some parts probably even in Phœnician times, the Northern Borgo before Hugh Falcandus visited Palermo.

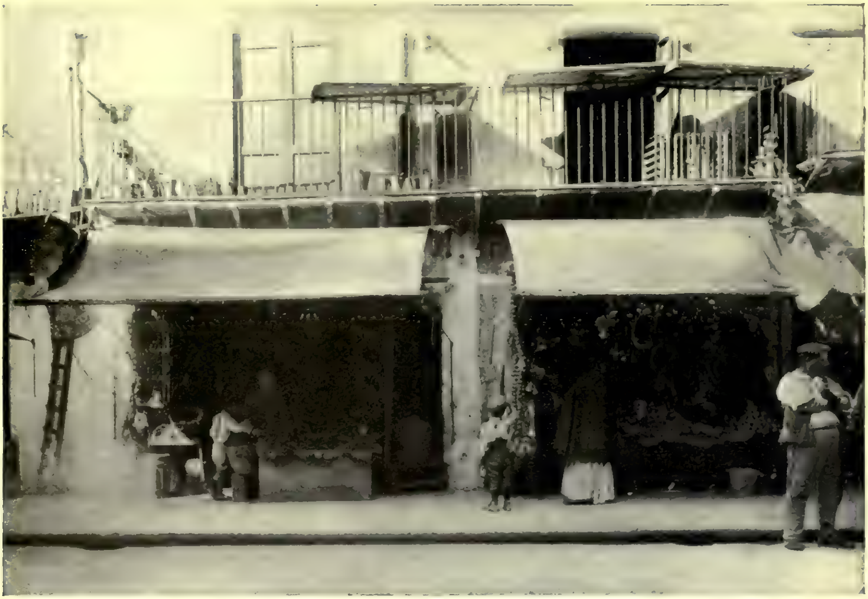
Long portions of this mediæval (Northern) wall are still standing (sometimes behind the fortifications of 1571), in some places mixed up with houses or later walls, or more picturesquely still, with *giarre*, the old Arabic water-towers with their patina in rust-colour and rich black and their fringes of maidenhair, in places where the water has oozed out.

In the south-west angle near the Corso Tuckery and a bit farther down, on the opposite side of Palermo, there are portions of the old fourteenth-century walls, with two fine gates. Outside the Porta St. Agata there are even fragments of the old Phœnician walls.

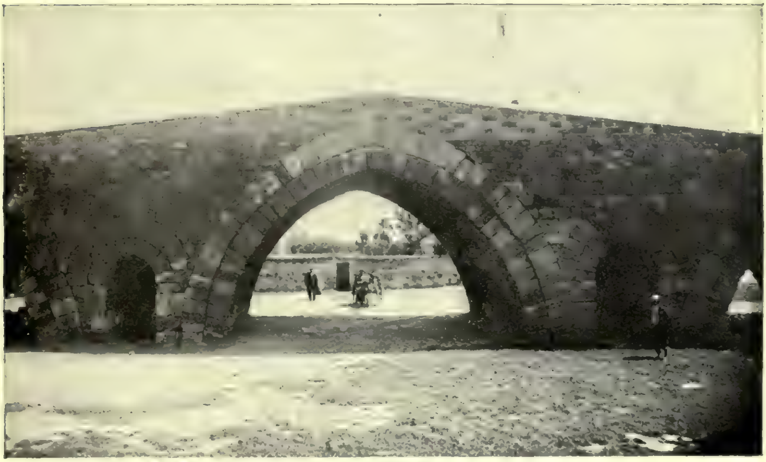
The old walls round the Kalsa have disappeared. Part of the old "Porta della Vittoria" through which Robert Guiscard forced his entrance into Palermo in 1178, are still preserved in the little church of that name. A glance at the map will show that the old sea-wall of the Kalsa was thus farther back than it is now. The present wall above the Foro Italico or Promenade, from the Porta Felice to the Porta dei Greci, now with magnificent terraces, public or private, overlooking the most beautiful of bays, were probably built by the Chiaramonte in the fourteenth century, so as to bring within the city walls the two *borghi*, "*dei Greci e dei Latini*" (presumably fishermen), which had grown up along the seashore.

⁂

Let us now retrace our steps to the top of this old Southern Borgo, to the region of gardens and convents, mentioned above, known as the Kemonia, on the banks of the river of this name. Below this there was the Albergaria, which by degrees became the name of the whole Southern Borgo, with first an old Arab quarter centring round the old market of Balharah, now Ballarò, still full of delightful colouristic surprises. The banks of the river running through this quarter and across part of the Ghetto are early described as marshy, muddy and rendered unsavoury by the stagnation of the waters and the heaps of litter left in the semi-abandoned gardens. Yet luxuriance there would be, some orange-trees probably and some human dwellings, stone huts or semi-ruined houses. We should not go far wrong, I think, in supposing that some of the "slums" of old Palermo were found here, and in part of the neighbouring Ghetto, below the sumptuous palaces of the Sherabuali. One soon emerges, however, into a more respectable quarter, in the Ghetto and all round, among honest hard-working craftsmen and small tradesmen, each living and working in their own street—the "grocers, money-changers, tailors, armourers, coppersmiths, corn merchants, oil vendors and all the other crafts," mentioned by ibn Hauqal as settled here in 973—and still there in 1909, at least partly. Many of the old streets still retain their old descriptive names, the Via degli Schioppettieri, for



PIAZZA BALLARÒ *p.* 286

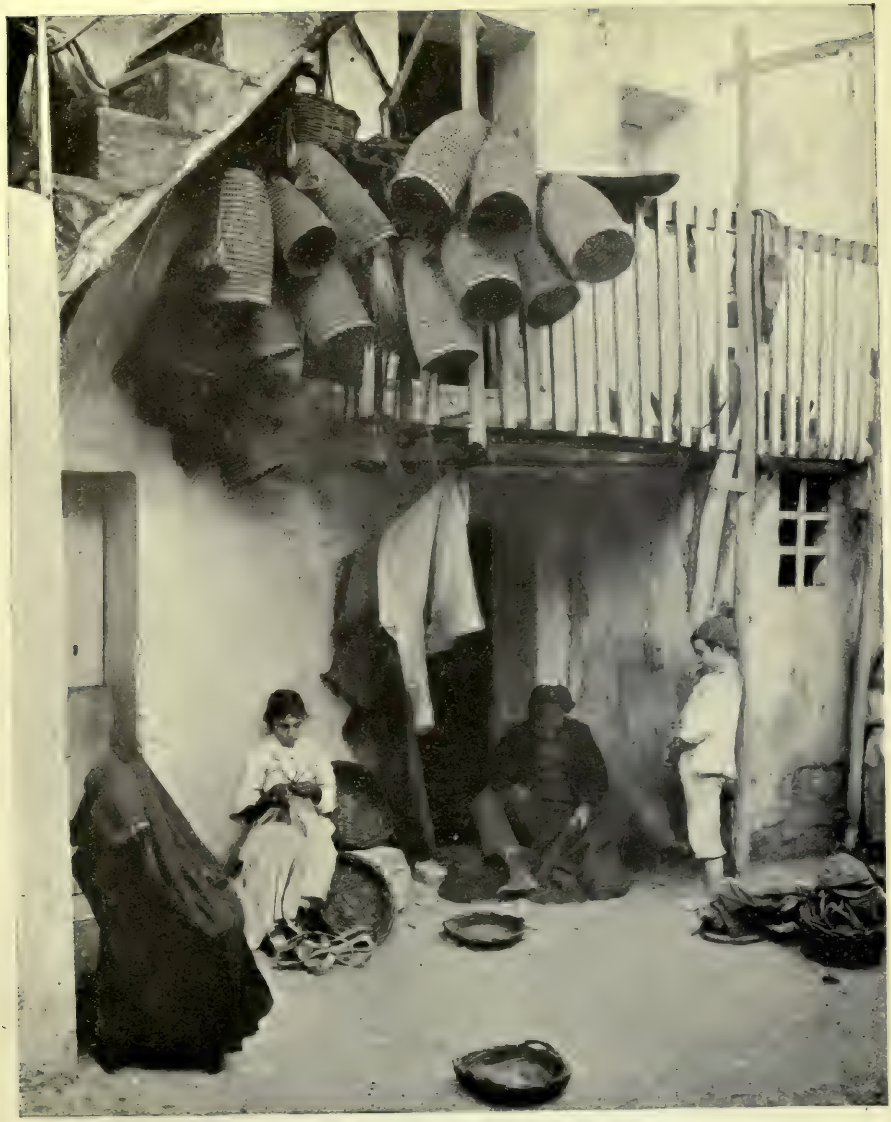


THE PONTE DELL' AMMIRAGLIO, NEAR PALERMO *p.* 287

instance, corresponds to the Armourers' Street of the early Middle Ages. In some the old craft is still plied, thus the Via dei Calderai is still lined with little open coppersmiths' workshops with craftsmen at work.

These craftsmen's quarters merged into the region for the sale of country produce—as it still does. There is no better place for the study of the painted donkey-carts than the old squares and *piazze* of this part of Palermo ; communicating by means of the Porta dei Termini (*Thermarum*) with the fertile and well-watered region—a grove of date-palms near S. Giovanni dei Lepprosi is mentioned in a deed of A.D. 1249—on the banks of the Oreto, then spanned by the superb Ponte dell Ammiraglio ascribed to Giorgios from Antioch. One of these squares, the Piazza di Sant' Anna, was in the eighteenth century still the corn market with huge warehouses for corn. The *bordonai* (muleteers) from the country had their church and we may be sure also their fondaks here. To this day some of the old inns in this quarter, where Sicilian farmers and better-class emigrants put up, represent the type and offer the kind of accommodation of the old fondachi. Suggestive names are here the Fondaco dell' Olio, the Via Latterini (derived according to Amari from Suc-el-Aaterinii or Grocers' Street).

The lower part of the Albergaria became fashionable in the later Middle Ages and several fine palaces were built here. The old inner wall of the Kalsa was gradually pulled down in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, or conceded piecemeal to convents and private persons, so that fragments of the old walls, gates and towers of the old splendid official residence of the Arabs were long found, embedded in convent buildings or the trees of large market gardens, in the haphazard mediæval way; but the Kalsa—which remained Arabian long after it had ceased to be professedly Mohammedan—is still surrounded by invisible walls. The population live a life apart, gathered in little family groups, the young women busied with fine embroidery, the very old with twisting rope of the leaves of the *cerfuglione* (wild palmetto), one of the children minding the pot, in narrow alleys thickly festooned aloft with gay multicoloured clothes-lines, or in sunny unpaved irregular courts, still surrounded by low houses of the old type with outside staircases; some white, others pink, blue, or pale yellow. The men are mostly fishermen; they do not as a rule take their wives from among the women of other quarters. They talk of "going to Palermo" when business takes them into the centre of the city—as they still do, also, in the Borgo, as the lower part of



FISHERMAN'S HOUSE IN THE KALSA QUARTER

Interguglielmi, Palermo

p. 288

the old Seralcadio or Northern Borgo is now called.

The upper part of the Northern Borgo, the As Saqalibah of ibn Hauqal, was later known as the Transpapyretum or the Seralcadì, or Shera of the Cadì, who presumably had a palace there. This name, modified to Seralcadio, gradually became the name of the whole Borgo, all the way down to the port; with one or two sub-names which need not detain us here.

It was early (in Arab times) peopled by colonies of traders and merchants from Venice, Pisa and the Levant (according to Amari, As Saqalibah signifies the Quarter of the Schiavoni, or Levantines). The first Amalfitani seem to have settled in the Cassaro and contributed, by their displays, to the splendour of the red-paved Via Marmorea or As Simat mentioned by Edrisi. There are mentions of a *Vicus Amalfitanorum Vetus* in the Cassaro.

When Hugh Falcandus wrote, the later Vicus Amalfitanorum described so enthusiastically by this connoisseur in textiles was evidently one of the sights of the busy, wealthy, important commercial quarter that had grown up outside the Porta Patitellorum. Farther down were the quarters and *loggie* (marts and counting-houses) of the Genoese, the Pisans and Catalans. There are mentions of these *loggie* early. They were all rebuilt in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ; and even these have now disappeared, but there is a sixteenth-century description of one which is worth giving :

" Questa è una grandissima stanza ferrata con quattro grandi grate di ferro che serrano quattro archi voltati sopra colonne di marmo ed eminenti. Vi si ascende per quattro scalini, donde si signoreggia la Loggia de' Genovesi. E coperta, a vi è dentro un cortile con sedili ed alberi di naranzi, ed una fonte di marmo, ove si versano le acque da un Orfeo con le muse ed altre vaghezze. Quivi tengono i signori Catalani molte sedie per sedere ad essi ed altri negozianti, con decoro di detta nazione."

Opposite this poetic counting-house with its four large arches and iron railings and the cortile inside " with marble benches and orange-trees and a marble fountain where the water is poured out by an Orpheus with the Muses and other pretty conceits," in the Piazza Garrafello, there was the lovely Renaissance fountain, now removed to the Piazza Marina.

These wealthy traders from Northern Italy dealt largely if by no means exclusively in fine cloths. There is still a side street leading up from the Corso to the supposed old site of the Loggia dei Pisani, known as the Loggia, where humble cloaks, caps and shawls in workaday tints for the country population are picturesquely arranged in thick clusters round the open doorways (windows there are none).

Mingling with these *loggie*, and the other larger open halls for the sale by auction of various commodities, there were the fine streets devoted to the sumptuous arts, such as the Argenteria Vecchia, still connecting the market of the Piazza Caracciolo (the old Buccheria Vechia) with the Piazza Garrafello. It is now mainly a street of cook-shops and fruit-shops, whose projecting awnings still help to give us a notion of the old physiognomy of the streets, rich in light and shadow and picturesque incidents, with its built-out *pinnati* or projecting pent-house roofs (voted a nuisance and done away with early in the seventeenth century). Nor must we forget (*cf.* p. 269) that all these shops had painted signs. After 1328 this quarter was paved.

All these nations and crafts had churches or at least chapels. Several of them, in later versions, like the (disappeared) *loggie*, can still be seen near the Porta San Giorgio (mentioned by Hugh Falcandus), a quiet but fashionable corner mostly occupied by churches, yet with a Via Magna, and a region of fine gardens outside the gate immediately beyond. Outside the walls there was a little church on the seashore, somewhere near the Castellamare, a *loggia* for the sale by auction of corn, and another for the sale of tunny-fish. In this region there is still a long row of picturesque, puzzling little buildings along the tram-line behind the Castellamare, which prove to be *loggie* for the sale by auction of fish.

CHAPTER XIII

LIFE IN MEDIÆVAL PALERMO

CATALANS, Amalfitans, Genoese, Venetians, mingling with a native population of Latins, Greeks and Jews, and in Norman and early Suabian times, Arabs and Berbers—the very names suffice to call up before us the motley throng in these streets in an age when every nationality and class had their own distinctive dress and all these "nations" and nationalities their own consuls and magistrates.

Yet all this kaleidoscopic medley was never a blend. Slow fusion there is always, for one reason or another—as best proved in Sicily itself by the pronounced "race types" still occurring, but intermarriages were infrequent, almost unheard of. Wealthy burghers might own houses, shops or vineyards, scattered all over Palermo; their social sympathies were limited to those living in the same quarter, where birds of a feather (craft) generally flocked together, or to members of their own religious "set."

In Norman times the arbitrary distinction made between the Greek and the Latin population still further complicated matters. As Greek were considered, irrespective of race, all the old inhabitants of the island that had assimilated Greek customs and lived under Greek law ; as Latins all the newcomers, the Italians, Lombards, French, and others, that came in with the Normans.

A complete study of social life in Mediæval Palermo would demand a volume and not a chapter. I must limit myself here to setting before the reader some of the more obviously interesting aspects of this life.

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It seems curious at first sight that there should be no trace of early mediæval organisation of the arts and crafts in a city where crafts were so important as to have given their names to nearly all the streets of the city, when not designated by the name of some neighbouring church ; there is only one instance, as far as I know, the Via de' Calvelli, of clan or family nomenclature, answering to the well-known Tuscan " Via degli Albizzi " or "Case dei Bardi."

I am not now referring to the " Arti " of the Tuscan communes, which one would not expect to find reproduced in monarchical Sicily. But it seems at first rather strange that there should be no hints or glimpses, even, of a mediæval codification of the Custom, corresponding to the Parisian "Livre des Métiers" of 1268, of the various crafts, regulating their relations to one another as producers, and crystallising the workshop traditions with regard to training in skill and modes of fair workmanship. *Maestranze*, where apprentices had to serve an apprenticeship (*lavorantado*) of several years and pass an examination before they were admitted to the rank of "Masters," are important features of Renaissance and later Palermo, but they emerge late (fifteenth century), and then at first only as Corporations, claiming their share in the government of the city, while we would fain know something about their early organisation and inner life as artistic handicrafts.

Can the absence of any codification of this kind be explained by the fact that Custom in the twelfth century—and especially in Sicily—was still too vital to need codification, while the later thirteenth century, when the need for committing to writing would begin to make itself felt, was, in Palermo, a period of uncertainty and bad government, when no undertakings of the kind would be attempted? Frederick the Suabian did some policing of the crafts, but there is no special reference to Palermo.

Further research may bring to light some important statutes. Thus far the earliest mention known of the Palermitan crafts (except names of streets and quarters) are the (locally) famous *Ordo Cereorum* of 1385. Now this document, being simply an enumeration of the "Order of the Tapers" to be carried in procession and offered to the cathedral at the vigil of the festival of the Assumption by representatives of the poor, the archbishop, the king, the king's court, &c., the five quarters of the city, and forty-five specified crafts, does not prove anything about the inner organisation of these crafts as crafts; yet it does prove indisputably that, in 1385, forty-five crafts were considered as entities and in some way representative of the townsfolk, and wealthy and important enough to be taxed. Among these crafts there is special mention, alongside of bankers (money-changers), drapers and other merchants, butchers, bakers and other caterers, silversmiths, carpenters, blacksmiths and all the rank and file of handicraftsmen, of the *Cereus cannamellarum*, the *Cereus quartarorum*, *i.e.* of confectioners, and vendors of pottery; also of gardeners, muleteers (*bordonai*) and carters of dung. For some reason which I have not seen explained, the "Greeks" are specially mentioned as owing a taper—there is no mention of Catalans, Amalfitans, Genoese or other foreign "nations."

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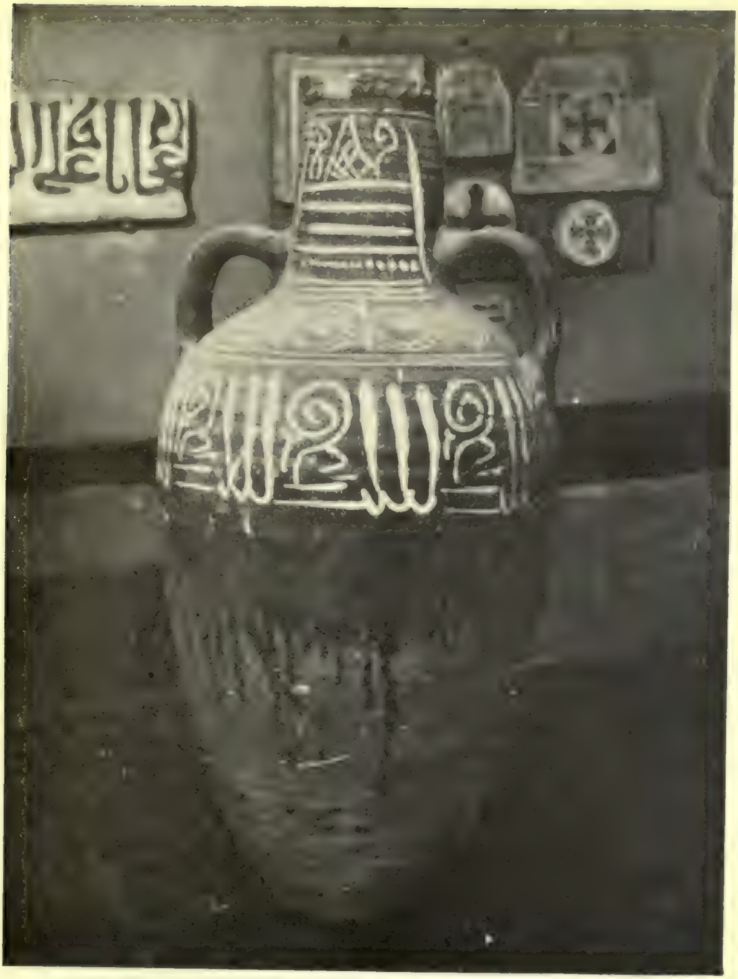
A good deal may be learnt in a most interesting way about private life in Mediæval Palermo by careful and observant study of present-day survivals. Only, all study of survivals is complicated, as cautious students know, by later cross-influences, and this is especially the case in Palermo, where some of the "Oriental" aspect, which it wears to-day, is doubtless due to Hispano-Moorish influence.

Thus, though we may perhaps infer, reasoning from analogy with the well-known mediæval cookshops of Paris long before the days of "La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pedauque," that the gaily coloured cookshops of Palermo, which strike a note as distinctive as the donkey-carts, are a mediæval survival, it would be a mistake to believe that the Oriental suggestiveness of their tiled walls is an inheritance from Saracenic times. Tiles were not then in general use, even in the East, for sheeting walls, and the interlocked star pattern that we find among the Palermitan tiles is Moorish in origin, not early Saracenic. In the same way some of the large earthenware jars for oil and the lovely white amphoræ still in use at Taormina and elsewhere for carrying water from the wells may be Hispano-Moorish forms that have found favour. But not all; it is quite safe to picture to ourselves the Palermitan women going for water to the public fountains so often mentioned, in some cases up and down the steep steps of the inner gates, carrying these tall amphoræ poised on their heads or left shoulders ; even if we did not have the precious testimony of the vases found, built in for the sake of lightness, when repairing the vaulting of the Martorana and other buildings of the Norman period. These vases, now in the Museum (Pl. LXVI.), are of reddish brown terracotta, handsome in colour and effectively adorned in white with a Saracenic scroll or some lettering. We can picture to ourselves, also, many of these women stopping for gossip gathered round the basins at the foot of the *giarre* (Pl. LXII.), the tall, imposing, and now so picturesque water-towers, built over wells or water-pipes from distant well-springs, and pressing up the water by some kind of siphon arrangement—which we must accept on the authority of Amari as an inheritance from the Arabs.

As for their clothes, it is possible, if not certain, that the townswomen took their walks abroad, never unattended when young, enveloped in some kind of voluminous draped garment, Græco-Oriental in character, and drawn well forward over the face so as to hide the chin and sometimes only leave a narrow slit for the eyes, as the women of some parts of Sicily still wear the fine old *mantu*, some fifty years ago in general use (*see* Pl. LVII.).



ARABO-NORMAN WATER-JAR, MUSEUM, PALERMO

The style of the lettering, according to Dr. Moritz, is somewhat later than that of the inscription on the stele, Pl. I.

Notice attached to the wall to the left of the jar, a fragment of inscription inlaid in porphyry and serpentine (*cf.* p. 127). To the right the quadrilingual inscription mentioned on p. 45.

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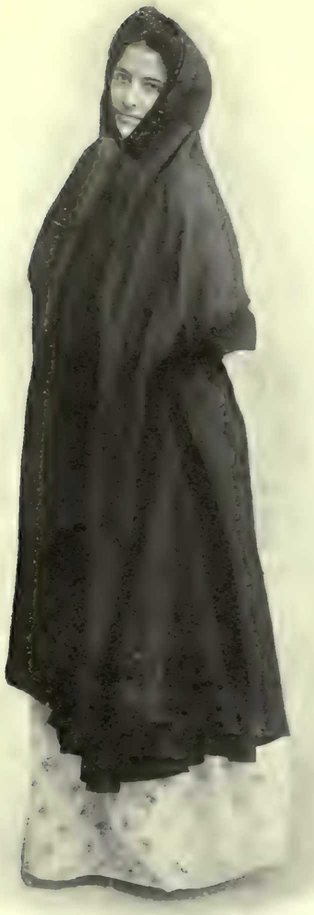
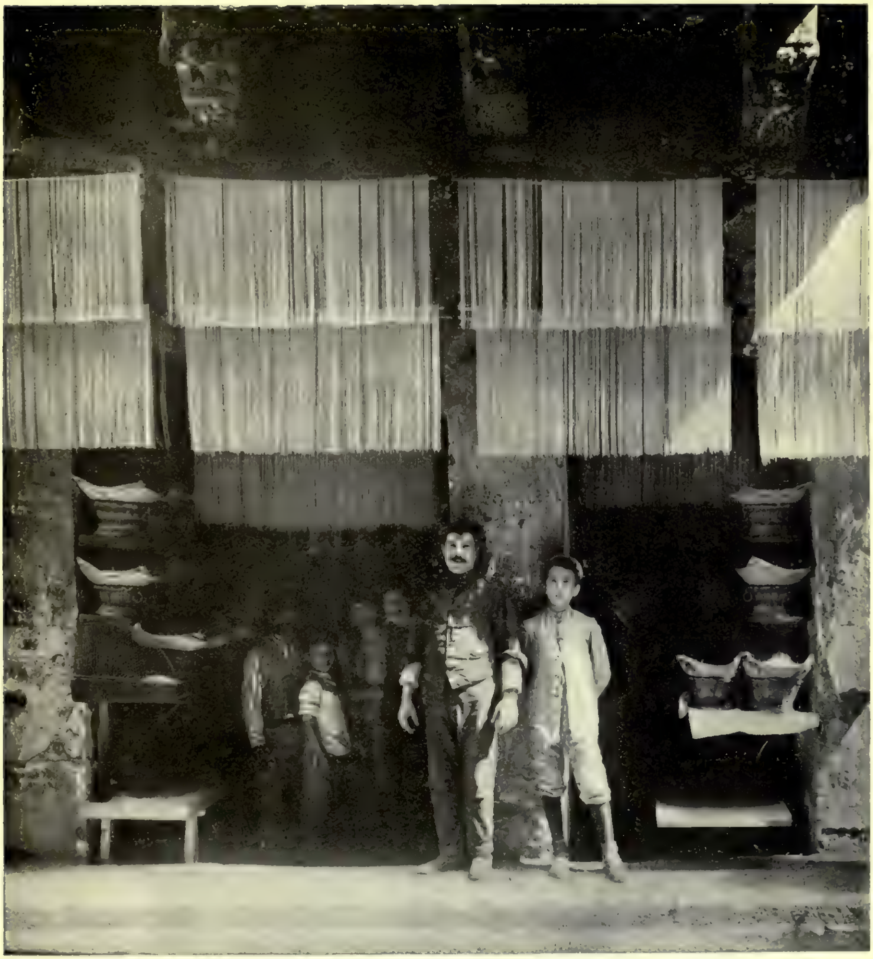


SICILIAN "MANTU" *p.* 299

The *mantu* is always held, never pinned, together. It is made of black silk, the upper part lined with sprigged silk or printed cotton. It is very full and complicated in cut, not a mere semicircle like the short white or cream-coloured mantles round the Etna, and the handsome rich dark blue cloaks of the county of Modica (*see* chapter xiv.). The folds are all sewn together in a bunch, held in place at the waist by one arm stuck akimbo. A certain demure swagger is thus *de rigueur*.

We are not very well off for illustrative material for the study of mediæval Palermitan costume. Miniature-painting did not flourish in Sicily as it did in the North. The interesting miniatures illustrating the "Carmen" of Pietro da Eboli (Pl. V.) are not, as far as I know and can judge, in any way distinctively Sicilian.

Some information may doubtless be gathered, as I have tried to do above, from the later more homely scenes, by Sicilian artists, of the mosaics of Monreale, but this is all. We are, instead, very well informed as to their clogs or *sabots;* three kinds were made under the arches of the Porta Patitelli, all with wooden soles but with different toe-pieces; one of self-coloured leather with one *roseta;* one of black leather with three *rosete* on each face, and one of tooled and cut leather and leather-gilt. With regard to their food, we have the complaint of poor Peter of Blois of "too much celery and fennel," and abundant other testimony as to the number (and delicacy) of their vegetables; we know from Hugh Falcandus that they were dressed with oil and lemon-juice; we have the survival in Italian of Arabic words for artichoke (*carciofo*) and vegetable marrow (*petronciana*), and in Sicilian for *cuccia* or even *cuscùsu*, a kind of wheaten pottage eaten with meat or pork fat—still occurring on special occasions. We have, further, the testimony of Edrisi as to the excellency of the *paste* (macaroni) exported from Trabia. For my own part I am convinced that an indubitable survival is represented by that national dish the *maccheroni alle sarde*, so truly mediæval in its complication and the combination of opposites in the sauce, or dressing, which consists of chopped onions fried in butter, with broccoli, salt anchovies, currants and fresh sardines. The macaroni is served in a flat dish gorgeously coloured on top with saffron, sometimes patterned in red with tomatoes, and garnished with fried sardines arranged like the spokes of a wheel. All visitors to Palermo know, further, that the Palermitan confectioners still excel in the variety, richness and elaboration of their cakes and sweetmeats, including the far-famed *cassata*. According to Amari, this Sicilian



"PASTIFICIO" IN THE VIA ALBERGARIA

The paste is ground in a mill at the back of the workshop and hung up over reeds to dry. The fancy kinds are displayed in light baskets very Greek in shape.

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student of Arabic civilisation, the descriptions by Makrizi of the banquets of sweetmeats at the festivals of the Ramadan exactly resemble the celebrations of Christmas, Easter, and the Carnival in Palermo, while some of the street cries of the Palermitan fruit-vendors contain the same phrases that are, or were, heard in Cairo (according to Lane's "Modern Egyptians").

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With regard to the most important of all customs of any people—marriage—the Sicilian usages of to-day do not suggest inferences, but supply facts. The well-known and well-studied marriage customs of to-day are not a survival, but a continuation of the well-known and well-studied marriage ritual of the Mediæval Church, embodying, as we know, several traits of beautiful, ancient Jewish and Oriental Christian symbolism in wedding rites largely composed of old Classic Roman elements. In some parts of Sicily there still linger also survivals (literally), or reminders, of the ancient usages respecting the home-coming of the bride, such as the almonds or walnuts (now sugar-coated) thrown to boys or young men by the bridegroom as a sign that the days of his youthful folly are over, the wheat or fruit (sometimes vegetables) thrown at the young people after the wedding ceremony, as symbols of fertility. In some places they throw wheat with one hand and salt (for wisdom—very wisely!) with the other. In Avola one of the neighbouring dames comes to meet the bride with her apron full of orange-leaves, throws some of them in her face, exclaiming, "Cuntintizza e figgi masculi" (Happiness and male issue), and strews the rest over the threshold. Sometimes two eggs are also broken at the feet of the groom. In the county of Modica a libation of wine is poured over the threshold and the vessel containing it broken. The bridal party then sit down in a formal circle, and the newly married couple are offered a spoonful of honey by a parent or near relative; the groom swallows half and passes the spoon to the bride. In many places the new home is festively decked with flowers against the home-coming. Dr. Pitrè publishes some interesting bridal songs, among these a whole sequence, very fine and simple, once sung in Naso, beginning in the house of the bride with strophes of farewell, good wishes, &c., sung by the young wife and her mother and sister, and continued in the house of the groom with appropriate strophes sung by his relatives.

As there was a law passed in Corleone towards the end of the fourteenth century forbidding singing, dancing, and the playing of the tambourine and other rustic instruments, to be kept up all night at weddings, we may take for granted that these songs represent a survival of an indubitable mediæval usage.

In Mediæval Palermo weddings were generally celebrated after nightfall, and torches and lit tapers were carried in the wedding procession—as attested by the laws against them. In 1196 Emperor Frederic issued an edict against them, trying (in vain) to limit their number to twelve. Laws against them were passed later again and again, but remained inoperative, as such laws do; while the tax was never paid which they tried to levy in Corleone on those who chose to be escorted by cornemuses (bagpipes), castanets and timbals, and accompanied by the antics of the mimes. *Joculatores* or *istriones* were a great feature of mediæval Palermitan weddings, and were given largess, as in the North, of cloaks or other articles of clothing, and money. The sumptuous wedding garments forming part of the dowry of the bride will be mentioned later. The wedding banquets spread consisted largely of all the elaborate forms of sweets referred to above—as they still do. When a Sclafani or a Chiaramonte married, which was made the occasion for now almost incredible display, there was a regular Land of Cockayne in front of the palace—profusely hung with arras and rich stuffs—where all who chose were regaled with cakes, fruit, and wine.

If we now turn to the legal and formal aspect of marriage, we shall find the three ceremonies enjoined by later mediæval law—the *jurari*, *ingagiari*, and *sposari*—still consecrated by usage. But first a word about the marriage laws of the Norman rulers, which are marked by their usual mixture of firmness and wide tolerance. The ceremonies enjoined are here only two: the formal betrothal, at which a valuable ring was given, and the solemn wedding in church "in their own way and as they chose" but "solemnly and publicly." Marriage contracts were written *secundum morem latinorum* or *secundum morem grecorum*. The marriages "in the Greek way" were based on the *régime dotal*, the marriages "in the Latin way" on the *comunione dei beni*.

The three ceremonies referred to above, that came into use in the later Middle Ages—*i.e.* the betrothal, the wedding and the benediction of the wedding pair, kneeling with lighted tapers before the altar, which had to take place, at first within a week, later within a year of the wedding—these three ceremonies, known as *jurari*, *ingagiari*, and *sposari*, are still consecrated by usage, and most formidably complicated by etiquette, so that the contracting families have been known to come to blows when a certain privilege was infringed.

But there was, and is, a fourth purely secular ceremony which even by the Sumptuary Laws was admitted to be an occasion when the bride might put on all the sumptuous new clothes—mentioned in the Contracts or Sumptuary Laws—of cloth of gold, or rich silk, with doublets of silk, embroidered golden crowns, veils bordered or fringed with silk or gold, rich girdles with heavy silver buckles, and of course a quantity of jewellery ; and that occasion was the *Stima* or valuation of the outfit given the bride by her parents. The custom of the *Stima* is still kept up in country districts ; the whole outfit, mattresses, household linen, clothes, &c., are spread out on the bed or hung on lines in the bride's home, which is crowded with relatives and others invited as witnesses. The expert called in, whose decision is final (generally a dressmaker), takes no notice of the *minuta* or list drawn up during the negotiations, and discussed between the two contracting families, but proceeds rapidly to make her own valuation, which is taken down at her dictation by a notary.

In many places the whole outfit is afterwards carried by the wedding guests to the future home. In one of these invaluable documents, the Sumptuary Laws, the earliest of which dates from 1272, it is enjoined that the outfit should be carried "honestly in coffers, or privily and not publicly and pompously" (spread out on sumpter-mules for all to see).

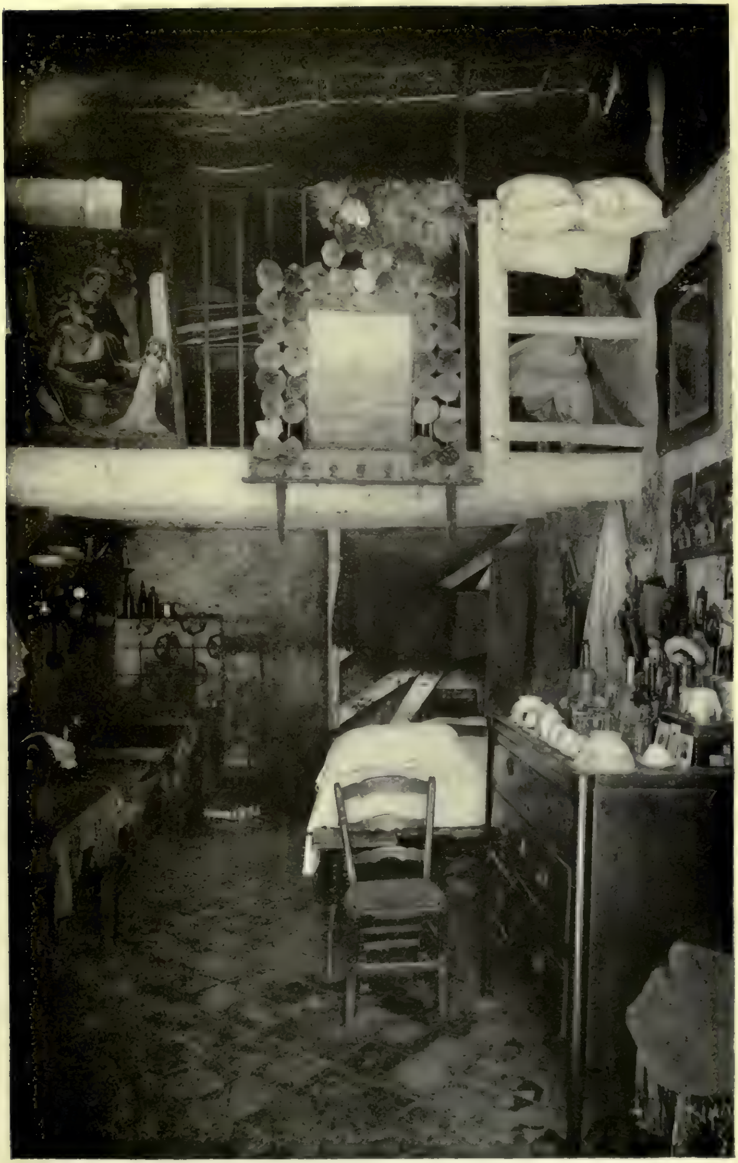
In mediæval lists and inventories there are frequent mentions, together with coverlets and bed-spreads of silk, generally red (*rubeo*), of sheets and towels, "for the face" or "for the hands," with bands of silk (*listis sericis*), *i.e.* probably bands or borders worked in silk by the bride as a maiden, in cross-stitch on the linen, like the beautiful specimens now seen in collections, generally worked in crimson silk, dating from the Renaissance but full of survivals of mediæval and Saracenesque design in the conventional griffins, &c., of the pattern. There are some fine ones in the Museum in Palermo. Sheets, towels and pillow-cases are still embroidered in coloured silks in some parts of Sicily. I was shown a whole outfit most elaborately embroidered in coloured silks by a clever worker at Termini Imerese—but not, alas! in cross-stitch and not in silks that looked washable. Another fine mode of adorning household linen, in use in mediæval times, was the fine drawn-work mentioned above (p. 258).

A good deal of information about the everyday life of the Palermitan townsfolk may be gleaned from some of the inventories published. Two given in full by Professor Garufi, as an appendix to his valuable essay on the "Usi Nuziali," are specially interesting, as they were taken after the husband's decease, and thus represent the goods and chattels actually in use in a Palermitan household after years of married life.

Our first couple, Nicolò Giovanni di Enrico, who died in 1394, and Agnes his wife, are well-to-do; after forty years of marriage, they owned a house with a cortile behind it, in the prosperous quarter outside the Porta Patitellorum, a little shop (*Apotheca Parva terranea*) in an enviable position in *Contrata Macelli magni* (or *Buccheria*), several lots and "pieces" of land, scattered about Palermo, a garden, and a vineyard in *Contrata Sancte Olive* (now the Piazza Sant' Oliva). Nicolò seems to have been a draper, as one of the items of the inventory is a large table of walnut "to measure the cloth on"; Agnes a thrifty and capable housewife, as her bedding—that pride of the Sicilian housewife—"three mattresses full of wool," was still, though "used," in excellent condition and valued at four onz in gold and fifteen tarì, or more than the little shop, which—leaving aside all difficult attempts at estimating the comparative value in our currency—seems incredible, but so the inventory says. The bed was only worth eight tarì, and consisted of the identical loose boards and trestles that one still sees in use everywhere (now with trestles of iron). The dinner-table was also a plain one on trestles, worth very little, but there are five table-cloths (three old and two new) mentioned; also two pairs of (old) sheets, two counterpanes, fourteen towels for the face (six old and eight new) and six for the hands. For some technical reason which escapes me there is no mention of her clothes, though there is of his, but the couple owned an "old curtain," which must have been of silk and handsome as it was still valued at twelve onz in gold, two cushions, one "to sit on," several mats or cloths (all old and some torn), two cups and two spoons of silver. Agnes was not art-loving nor even very pious, the icon (picture) is not even estimated, and the "tabernacle" for this icon only valued at one tarì. The furniture consisted of a bench, or settle, an "arch-bench" (*archibanchia*) with three drawers, two *chaherie seu sedilia* (high-backed chairs) and sundry coffers, boxes and baskets (all duly painted, we may be sure, though the inventory takes no notice of this, in bright gay blues and reds and yellows, in a rough-and-ready version of the Chiaramonte style which survives to this day, on the ornament of the donkey-carts). All the pots and pans and bowls mentioned are of copper, and rather valuable. There is no mention of pottery except a couple of jars and a large tub—a *tino* with its *tinello*—(used for making wine). It seems as if Nicolò kept or sublet a tavern in his *Apotheca Parva* on the market. Among other items of the inventory there is a barrel full of white wine and other utensils of a tavern (*stovilibus*—*cf.* Italian *stoviglia*) valued together at thirty-five ounces in gold. Their own house was worth forty, the highest value in the inventory. Baskets, a sieve for flour and the like are not lacking in careful Agnes's kitchen, together with several utensils whose use or significance it is now difficult to determine. There is also a lamp (*lamperium*) of yellow copper, a lantern, a large candlestick of iron, two iron tripods and—most interesting of all—a *capsetta de ligno pro coquina*—"a box of wood for cooking"—of the identical kind still in use by goatherds, lined with fireproof clay (or bricks).

The second couple we make acquaintance with in this way are of another stamp. Pietro Amato died (in Naples) in 1399, leaving a widow, Perna, and a daughter, Janella, and his affairs in a muddle, with heaps of debts and all the things pawned that had most value: the best bedding, the large copper bowl, the counterpane of green silk on a gold ground, worth three onz in gold, the curtain of silk. Perna strikes us as vain and not a good housewife. Her bedding was in a disgraceful condition and only worth eight tarì, even the best bedding (in pawn) was only worth three onz. She only had one sheet and four towels, but two (old) gowns of silk (yellow) and velvet (red); a third "tunic" of peacock-coloured silk had been sold for the creditors. Her furniture was handsomer than Agnes's, her "bench of walnut with three drawers," for instance, was worth three times as much as Agnes's "archbench," and among her possessions there is an ivory casket and a female slave (*item serve unuis veteris nomine Magdalena*), old and not worth very much, it is true, only five onz in gold and fifteen tarì, or a good deal less than the old silk curtain, which was worth eight onz in gold. (These silken hangings seem to have been very valuable. In 1325, by sentence of the Prætorian Court, Donna Giaçoma di Manda was assigned a house in compensation for a curtain with silk borders which had not been duly delivered.) Pietro was given an honourable funeral with hired mourners (*reputatrici*), at which Perna and Janella were clothed in "tunics" of black cloth.

Their house was in *Quartiere chalcie*, and their vineyard outside the Porta Thermarum in a lovely situation—in *Contrate Maris dulcis* (Mardolce). The house is described as partly two-storied (*solaratum*) and partly one-storied (*terranearum*), *i.e.* a house of one story with a "solar" on beams over part of it, of the type still lingering in some country



PALERMITAN "BASSO"
Opening on to the street.

p. 310

districts (*cf.* p. 98) and in Palermo in the so-called *bassi* of the poor.

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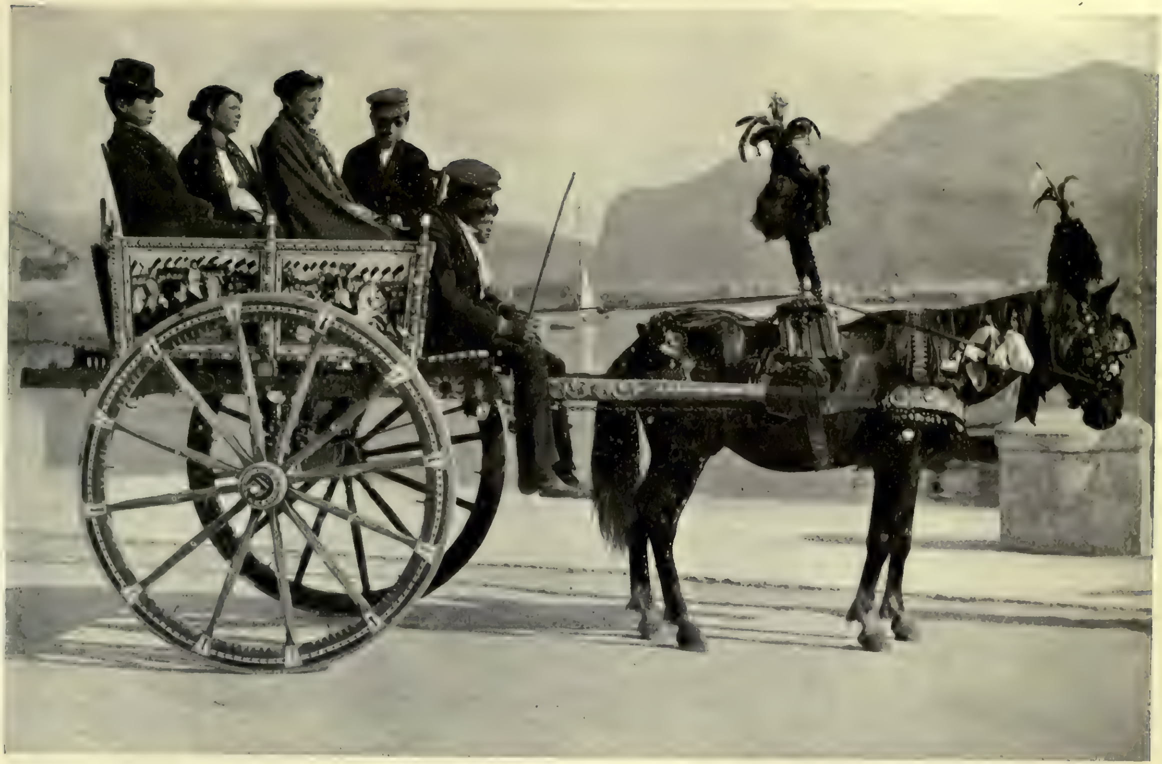
How far did these people, did Nicolò and Agnes, Perna and Janella, share in the strenuous spiritual life that is never lacking in any period and least of all in the dewy sun-flushed morning hour, still full of long, trembling shadows, of modern times, represented by the Middle Ages? Or how far even suspect the existence of deeper issues? There are no means of finding out; all we know is that life was neither lacking in what we now call poetry, nor in factors that make for the delight of the eye, if Agnes could for a moment forget her "many cares" and Perna her worries. The deeply impressive ceremonies of the Church in the mystically beautiful setting, the quiet prayer at the twilight hour in the parish church as we still see the women of the Kalsa in the Magione, would alternate with the transformation of whole streets, at the occasion of an aristocratic wedding, into a baronial hall, decked with gorgeous stuffs, strewn with roses and violets, scented waters and odorous leaves, and traversed by noble lords and ladies in beautiful clothes, mounted on white palfreys with sumptuous saddle-cloths, gilt saddles and bridles, preceded by torches and attended by musicians, clowns and jugglers ; or with all the dramatic rites, pantomimes, shows, pageants and processions, often Classical in origin, staged and conducted by the clergy, on the Saints' days ; including incipient Mysteries, and Miracle Plays, performed inside or outside the cathedrals or minsters, or grotesque pantomimes, tolerated, if not encouraged, by the clergy, such as the quaint mimic ceremony corresponding to the French *fêtes des fous*, which is known to have been celebrated in Mediæval Palermo, when one of the choristers, called for the occasion Vescovello or Piscopello, was dressed up like a bishop, mitre, crook, crucifix and all, and allowed to officiate, attended by his companions, and even to preach a sermon from the pulpit. A procession down the Cassaro followed, when the young bishop's benediction was eagerly sought for by the people. From Easter to Midsummer (St. John's Day) these Saints' days were, moreover, made the occasion of regular outings by the Palermitan townsfolk (perhaps disguised as pilgrimages) to some favourite spot in the beautiful surroundings, with commemorative feasts of hard-boiled eggs or new beans, many pretty formal rites and observances handed down from their pagan ancestors, and a good deal of broad mediæval fun.



CARRETTO FROM PALERMO, WITH PALERMITAN TYPES

The harness is embroidered in silver and tinsel on red and blue. The plumes are crimson.

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CHAPTER XIV

SURVIVALS

MANY of the old customs and usages here touched upon, which made the Sicily of only yesterday so profoundly interesting to the student of Social History, are now doubtless going, if not gone. Others still survive, full of tenacious vitality, and I propose to devote this last chapter to the discussion and description of some of these survivals, mostly as observed and studied at first hand.

The most striking and so to speak obvious of these are the well-known donkey-carts (*carretti*), that make one's first landing in Palermo one of the bright, strong impressions that never fade. The low houses near the port with their flat roofs, the open spaces, the white dazzling quality of the early morning sunlight, traversed by those brilliant apparitions—a round-arched cook-shop even, in a little white front of its own, gaily tiled and set round with copper pans—surely this is not in Europe?

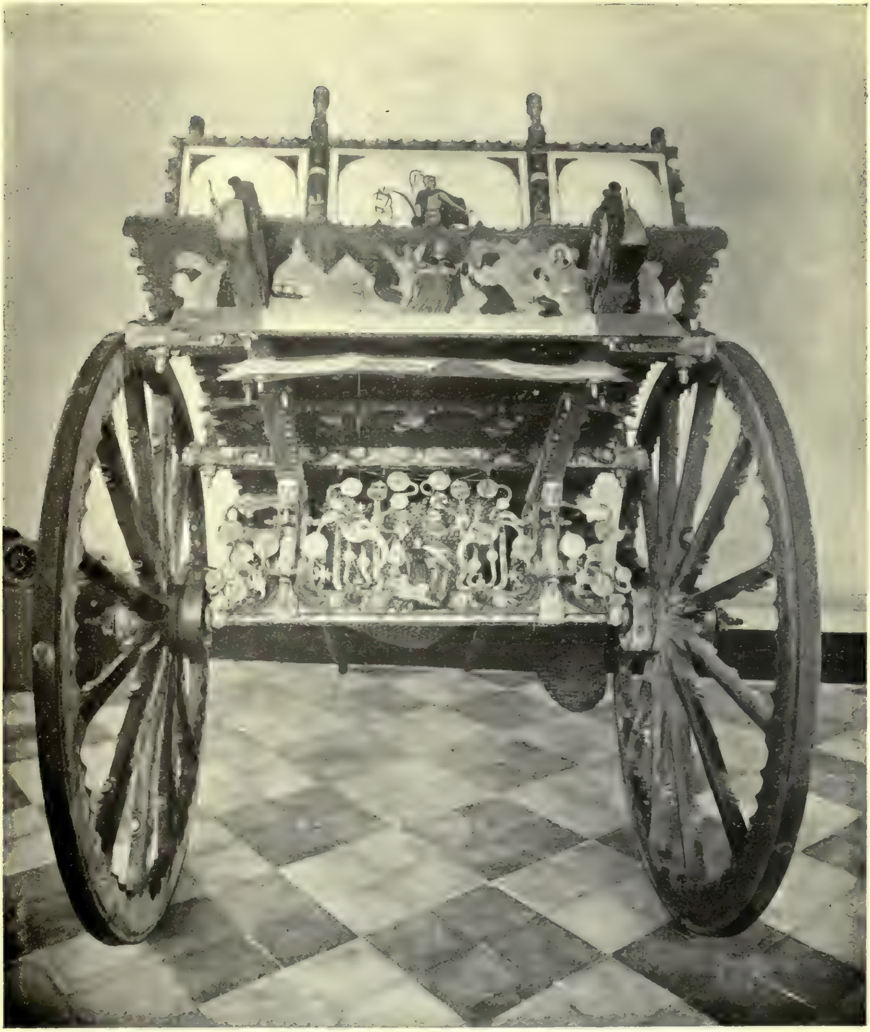
Well known as they are, these donkey-carts, they have not received the attention they deserve as survivals of old modes of workmanship and not merely of ancient motives or time-honoured craving for brightness and colour. A *carretto* is an elaborate structure of wrought iron and expensive woods, ash and walnut. There are thus three crafts engaged in the making and painting of them, and it was a pleasure and a revelation to me to hunt up some of the workshops where they are built and carved, and study the wood-carving before it is coated with paint. The finest are lavishly carved with a profusion of scrolls, detached rosettes, stars, whorls, grotesques of various kinds, and little human heads; also figure-subjects, tiny in scale, in high relief pierced through. The most important scrolls occur on the shafts; favourite motives are a little floral scroll, fourteenth or fifteenth century in character, a long scaly fish and a mermaid, but I noticed several others, combinations of scrolls and grotesques, recalling the paintings from Trapani, and I noticed that the wood-carvers showed them with pride. There is thus a certain conventional sameness, a traditional supply of subjects most in demand or turned out indefatigably by a favourite workshop, but also evidence of a certain freedom, when the customer chooses to pay for it. The finest work is put on the little figure-subjects carved either on the cross-piece under the cart at the back, where it is best seen, or on the axle (where it is not seen at all). The carving is here careful and the wood pierced through. The subjects vary ; the ones that one sees oftenest are the Martyrdom of Santa Rosalia, the patron saint of Palermo, or Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus ; another favourite is the figure of Panormus, or tutelary genius of Palermo, figured as a river-god. When I asked one carver—the cleverest one, a quiet kind of fellow, absorbed in his work—if he used a sketch or model for it, he answered : "Oh no, I just go to the Public Gardens and look at *him* there." I noticed, however, that in the very delicate Martyrdom of Santa Rosalia by the same man, the saint wears a very operatic costume in a false mediæval setting—so the artist must have been "influenced" by the "visual memory" of some popular wood-cut, dating about forty or fifty years back. Yet he was quite sincere about admitting when he had "found it in a book," with regard to the heads in high relief, for instance : "This middle one out of a book, the others out of my head [tapping it]" ; "This one [a very amusing Pulcinella] for fun [*per ridere*]," supplemented his friend, the *padrone*. There is often a lot of quiet fun about these heads, though most of those in vogue are naturally traditional. Sometimes the fun is unintentional, as in certain mock-heroic heads of Victor Emmanuel II., Cavour, Garibaldi and the reigning house, of which the carver was very proud. In 1910 a new motive that had been introduced and found favour for certain parts of the lower framework was a grotesque frieze of merry-makers with trees, a little house, a mule with its *carretto*, &c.

The smith, too, is a regular mediæval craftsman in his way, beating out his iron—for parts of the structure that remain more or less hidden—into meandering scrolls of flat bars and little rounds, painted as suns, moons and flowers, or even comical grotesques, as in our illustration, showing the capricious blend, full of verve, of wrought iron and carving just round and above the axle.

All this is covered with paint in the gayest of colours, in true mediæval fashion. After the *carretto* has been selected, or made to order (and 250 or 300 lire paid for it, according to the amount of work put in), it is taken to the painter's; the subjects of the five picture panels are selected or indicated by the customer, the cost and detail of the ornament duly gone into. Complete painting, when no expense is spared, costs 300 lire.

There is a double tradition governing the painting of these donkey-carts: decorative and iconographical.

The decorative art "of the people" is every-



CARRETTO FROM PALERMO

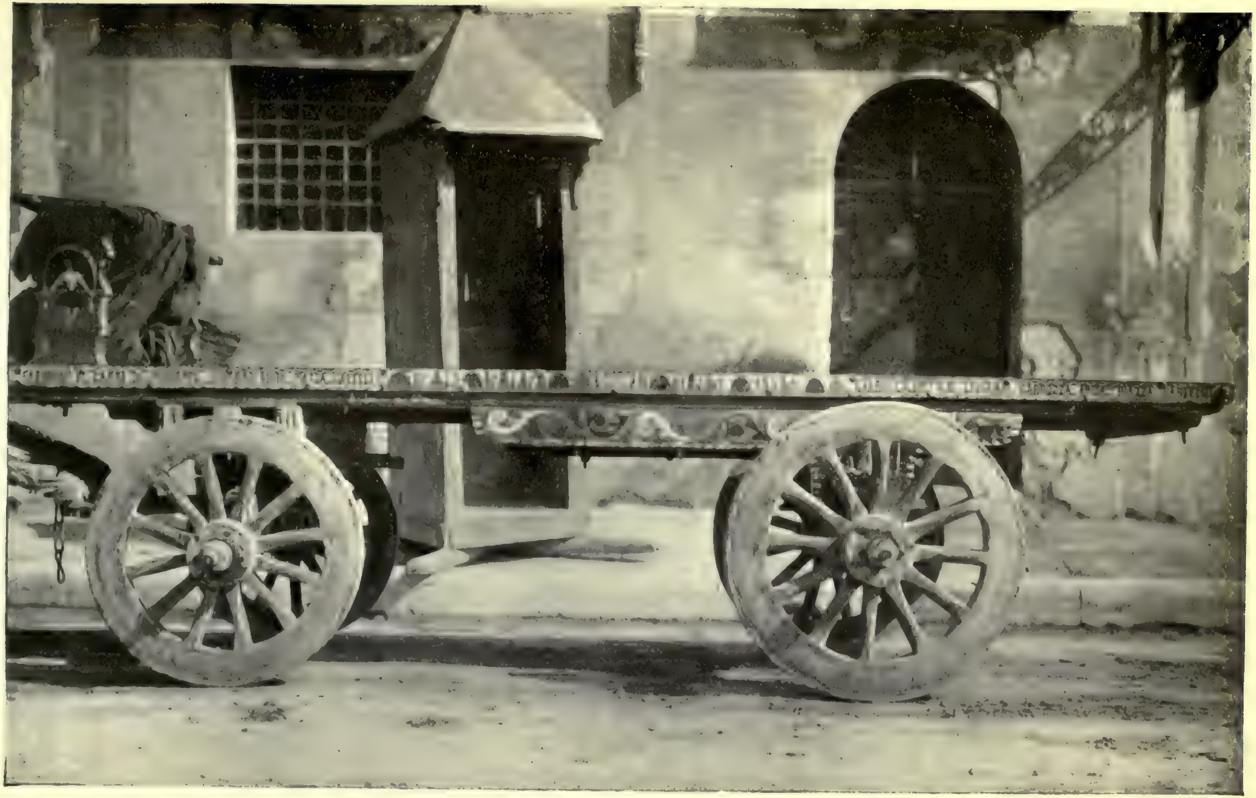
The scroll-work round and above the axle is of wrought iron, painted; all the rest of carved and painted wood.

where a curious blend of two factors or elements. In old-settled lands it is nowhere entirely naïve and spontaneous; the bent-leaf ornament painted on the fine blue waggons of Surrey is obviously Gothic; the acanthus scrolls carved on wooden boxes, knife-handles and the like in Norway are Romanesque; the sunk chipped-work pattern, geometric in design and resembling tracery when elaborate, which occurs almost everywhere, is early mediæval—with a long line of filiation behind this; the gay sprawling tulips of Swedish peasant painting on boxes, &c., of a generation or two ago, are rococo; Oriental-Byzantine influences prevail in Russia; there are traces everywhere of one or other of the "historic" styles which, for some occult reason, have struck root and become traditional. Yet alongside of this there is evidence almost everywhere of a certain childish naïveté producing the same results in widely distant lands. Cherubs and roses, landscapes and nude nymphs, when attempted, are pretty much the same all over Europe, and the still simpler (geometric) "ornamental ideas" of the untaught talented peasant closely related to those of the untaught talented child. There are certain ornamental motives of the most primitive kind in use on the Palermitan donkey-carts, gay waves, ripples, or triangles of red, white and blue which might have grown up almost anywhere. Yet even here the predilection for bright tricoloured mosaic stars is distinctly Saracenic.

And it would be a great mistake to think that those painters are untaught. The boys are caught young, when hardly out the kindergarten age, and set to work to daub on red, white and blue in splashes—"brushwork" literally !—in appropriate places. (There are two of them at work at once in one *opificio*, seated cross-legged, like busy little brownies, one under the cart, one between the shafts, with a huge pot of paint beside them.) Every successive step or finer stroke is taught—or shown ; it is all a matter of convention or tradition, which they imbibe with the "atmosphere" and the smell of the turpentine (progress determined by the hopes of a rise in salary). These Palermitan workshops are of special interest to the student of art as still showing, one feels, what must have been the conditions on a larger scale of the mediæval workshops, with their community of aim and division of labour. Even the High Art represented by the picture panels is not all, as we shall see, the work of the master's own hand.

There is not much room for pure painted ornament on the donkey-carts ; all is predetermined by carving, or reduced to splotches, bold concentric dashes, or the narrowest of borders. On some older carts, however, there is a painted composite

LXXII



PAINTED "TRAINO" FROM PALERMO

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border on the part of the shaft under the body of the cart.

The decorative tradition here shown—or asserting itself on the borders that have burst out into blossom on those modern interlopers, the *traini*—is unmistakably a continuation of the Arabo-Sicilian style of the late mediæval palaces as best seen and studied in the Palazzo Chiaramonte. The current of tradition, however, seems to have run underground in some mysterious way during a century or two.

Painted timber roofs were doubtless, as suggested above (p. 256), the fashion in smaller houses in conservative Palermo long after the late Renaissance had triumphed elsewhere, but by degrees even these disappeared, and there is no painting on any other kind of objects preserved as far as I know, that actually proves the existence, in the eighteenth century, of a rough-and-ready school of decorative painting on a par with the present-day workshops.

The Ethnographical Museum, now at last called into being by the indefatigable zeal of Dr. Pitrè, may prove the means of bringing them to light, but the material now available for study in the Museum and in some private palaces points to one conclusion only : there was plenty of painting on wood in eighteenth-century Palermo on furniture, trays, boxes and the like, very pretty and distinctive, very Sicilian, but unmistakably dainty, and in style rococo. The donkey-carts themselves were probably gaily painted—one cannot think of them as merely red, or even yellow—but it is best not to assert anything about the style of their ornamentation. From the simple representations, always of religious subjects, shown on the carts figured on early nineteenth-century *ex-voto* pictures, Dr. Pitrè is inclined to think that the gorgeous display we now see is *una moda*, a fashion that has obtained.

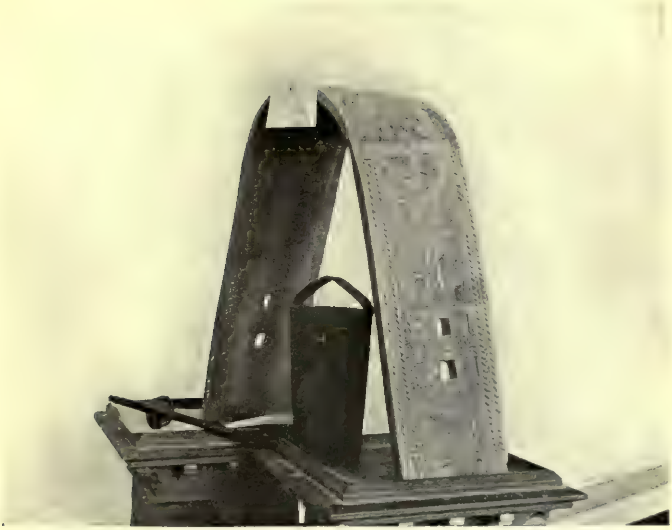
However this may be, there is no doubt of the simple fact that the borders painted on donkey-carts and drays in these Palermitan workshops have more in common with the borders painted on the beams of the Chiaramonte ceiling than with contemporary "Popular art" elsewhere in Europe. Scrolls, when used, are rougher, but similar ; stars, rosettes, even a kind of filigree, are favourite motives ; there is the same aversion from the continuous, Western scroll, the same tendency towards studding the border with decorative stops, so to say, lozenges, stars, &c. ; a favourite and effective device is two scolloped shells at some distance from one another. There are the same little medallion panels let into the design, with heads in the round ones, spirited little episodes in the longer ones ; there is even something of the same fertility of invention. After a while, one of course sees and recognises the same motives repeated again and again—but so one does in all living art; we may be sure that Master Simuni and Master Chicu repeated the motives, "found in their heads" for the Palazzo Chiaramonte, on other ceilings now lost. But even so the wealth and variety of motive shown is astounding, with its little touches of fun and fancy, especially in the heads (greatly appreciated by the street boys who come round one with their good-humoured comments, and help one to interpret.)

In the small oblong panels are represented little figure-subjects of an anecdotic character; among those I noticed were knightly encounters (*cf.* Palazzo Chiaramonte), carnival scenes, a Saltarello, a dancing woman in short skirts but Tyrolese costume, an idyllic languishing love scene, some brigands, &c. Being painted on a light ground with well-observed proportions with regard to the tiny scale of the panel, they often have a surprising daintiness of effect. Sometimes a "predella" of three of these scenes replaces the carving on the "cross-piece" at the back.

It should be noticed that even these interlopers, the *traini*, or long, flat drays, recently introduced, are painted in this way, showing the irrepressibility of the instinctive craving for polychromatic decoration *on this kind of object.* There is no trace of this instinct in the homes of the owners of these carts. Their furniture (*see* Pl. LXIX.) now consists mainly of a huge bed on trestles, a cupboard or two, and a cumbrous ugly chest of drawers with a dusty coffee-set, duly set out on top ; their craving for colour is amply satisfied by gaudy oleographs of saints. On cows' collars and goats' collars one still often (as mentioned on p. 257) sees painted ornament in the same style—but these are becoming rarer every year.

The small carts drawn by tiny Sardinian donkeys, used for hawking vegetables about the streets, are also painted, but another tradition seems to obtain here ; one sees more religious subjects and also a good many with a little basket of roses, quite rococo in style, prettily painted on the four panels —by some strange caprice of the whimsical laws governing survivals.

One notices the same thing at Catania. The donkey-carts are there comparatively uninteresting. It is a curious fact that it is really only the *carretti* of Palermo and Monreale that represent the old tradition. The glittering, gorgeous, Spanish-looking harness, all embroidered with silver and tinsel, with its two magnificent crimson plumes, is the same everywhere, but all the carts I saw outside of Palermo were more conscientiously painted, with attempts at better rendering, that only succeeded in dulling the colour and spoiling the style. But



COW'S COLLAR, ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM, PALERMO

Carved and painted with a representation of the Crucifixion. In the field below, a calf. *p.* 322

I noticed some very pretty long barrows for the sale of vegetables at Catania. The form was of the type one sees in certain streets of London on Saturday nights—long, flat drays with two wheels and two hind legs, so to say—and possibly recent, but the ornamental tradition that had transformed these, as the Palermitan tradition has transformed the *traini*, is unmistakably old;—a survival—but from the late eighteenth century, with a pretty and varied floral design.

Boats and fishing-smacks are also objects where the expectant eye (at least along the north coast) still craves painted ornament. Here again it is an eighteenth-century tradition that survives, in the sportive sirens and a very pretty festooned garland running along under the gunwale of the "finest" ones. The pictures of the Madonna, of SS. Cosmo and Damian, the patron saints of fishermen, and the Archangel Michael are less markedly Sicilian in style.

But to return to the donkey-carts and their iconographical tradition, which would seem to have grown up within a century; Dr. Pitrè tells me that he has noticed that the *carretti* figured on old *ex-voto* pictures always show representations of the Madonna, of miracles or other sacred subjects. The range of subjects to-day is certainly so wide as to seem, during the first few weeks of study, almost unlimited. The subjects are Biblical, classical, historic, romantic, taken from Tasso or rather the Paladini di Francia, and even modern, dealing with Garibaldi or the Greek Revolution. A few years ago scenes from the "Gerusalemme Liberata" predominated on these carts. One still sees a good many of them, but besides these, the subjects now greatly in vogue seem to be Cristoforo Colombo and Carlo Quinto, as duly set forth in the inscriptions, which never fail, giving the name and address of maker and painter and a legend explaining the subject, generally very comically spelt and worded. A certain Re Ladislao and Regina Maria are also great favourites, though in a less degree; likewise "La Morte di Virginia," depicted in classical dress of sorts with something resembling a temple in the background, inscribed with the letters S.P.Q.R.; and the adventures of a certain Re Ruggiero di Loria, which suggests some verbal confusion somewhere. In 1910 a set of classical subjects seemed coming into favour, including "La Morte di Aidone" and "Pane e Siringa" (a nude nymph on a grassy bank). But whatever the subject, and I noticed many more, or the costume, which varies with the subject, so that Greeks of 1832 appeared in short white petticoats, the style is always the same—incorrect and quaintly conventional, but seldom heavy, and least of all hesitating.

After all the ornament has been painted, the cart is put in the best light, and the master sets to work to draw or rather paint the precise outlines of the figure composition, drawn very neatly in dark brown with a fine brush on the grey panels. A skilled assistant is then set to work to lay on the paint, one or at most two tints at a time, the flesh-colour being put on ready mixed, a dull, darkish red. Then the master steps in again for the finer work; "shadows," used sparingly, details of dress or accoutrement requiring more care, a finer brush and a better-stored memory. Finally he takes up his finest brush, loads his palette with a dark rich brown, and proceeds to paint in the eyes, eyebrows and lashes, to add finishing-touches to lips, nostrils and hair. "That needs skill," said I to one painter. "Ah yes," said he, with eyes kindling, "it is that which gives life."

From what I saw and gathered, I am convinced that the first source of iconographical inspiration is always "visual"; there is no improvisation. One artist, indeed, showed me a whole sheaf of old lithographs (in quarto), another a roll of old prints which he said he laid out for the customer to choose from, when his mind was not made up already. Among these I recognised the "Death of Virginia" in a hard, pseudo-classical steel engraving; and "Christopher Columbus" in a set of four wretched German oleographs that one often sees in Italian peasant homes. When painted on the panels both of these are always quite freely translated into the inimitable Sicilian style. The prototype or pattern is only the point of departure, the style entirely traditional without the slightest hint of a cartoon or working drawing of any kind. One artist, a jolly, fat debonair fellow, still young, who thought a good deal of himself and his art, and was very friendly when I passed myself off as an artist, declared that he painted his subjects out of his head—which only meant, of course, that his head was *meublé*, as the French say, with traditional motives passed on from his father or master. He said, for instance, that the customer generally indicated the subject, but sometimes left it to him, and then he painted "just what he chose," mentioning in an airy way "Cristoforo, le Crociate"—*i.e.* the most well-worn of all the themes, and painted, I noticed, in exactly the same manner as in workshops at the other end of Palermo. The painter of the ornament is known as the *indoratore* or gilder. When asked if designs were used for this ornament, my friend Costantino, the fat, jolly one, scorned the notion. "*I* know, I have it all in my head and he watches me at work till he knows too." Asked to paint a sample he took up the brushes and went at it with admirable *brio.* Boys begin early and are given a few soldi a day. When the apprentice can be trusted to lay on the last coat of bright yellow on which the *indoratore* paints the ornament, and paint the big mosaic stars on the inner sides, he gets one franc a day. A good *indoratore* is paid three francs a day.

I asked for fun if Costantino ever painted *cartelloni* (posters) for the *opra* (marionette theatre). "Those! [with fine scorn] they are only painted in water-colours and without art. I could paint them, *if I* chose, but they [the painters] don't know *my art.*" As a matter of fact these posters—long strips of paper hung up outside the marionette theatres, representing from eight to twelve scenes from the part of the cycle of the "Reali di Francia" just then going on—these posters represent a far more spontaneous form of art than the donkey-carts; a bastard production, grown up outside the pale of well-established tradition, reckless wild flowers unhampered by the gardening of crafts and guilds—and really often as spirited as they are popular. They are generally painted by men who do not even earn their living that way, devotees of the *opra*, who have watched the scenes of "Chivalrie" unrolled before their eyes, until they were compelled by some inner instinct to reproduce them (just as others, generally sons or nephews of the *oprante*, have gazed and listened for years—until they knew the great cycles by heart—and finally became *opranti* in their turn).

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In the Golden Ages, of Yesterday, the lonely herdsman of Sicily was still invariably an artist "whiling away the weary hours" by carving, or more often incising ornament on all the objects available; cups of horn, flasks of gourds, castanets, flutes, boxes, wooden spoons, the implements of weaving and spinning, and other utensils for the cottage home, as well as collars for his cows or goats. As to their mode of work when incising a figure subject, Salamone-Marino gives the valuable information that they always need a pattern, and consult it very closely when first drawing the subject. After that the whole design remains fixed in their memories and can be reproduced at any time with incredible rapidity, without ever omitting or altering a single detail.

⁂

That most interesting survival, the marionette theatre, representing night after night scenes from the history of the Paladins of France woven together into a great cycle which it takes nearly a year to represent—the *opra*, as the people call it—does not fall within the limits of this book, as it cannot be traced back to the Middle Ages. Even if it did, I should be unable to describe it, as the presence of an outsider, even a middle-class Palermitan, at once chills the audience and breaks the flow of passionate, eager, breathless sympathy between the spectator and the drama enacted on the mimic stage; and doubly so if this outsider happens to be a foreigner and a woman. For the same reason I am unable to say anything at first hand about the *contastorie* * or "tale-tellers," those undoubted mediæval survivals. Could anything be more suggestive of what we know about the Middle Ages than these untaught and often illiterate reciters, with their tales of "Roland and Oliver," eagerly listened to by an illiterate audience of fishermen, boys and apprentice lads? What matter if the tales represent a blend of Sicilian oral tradition and various Italian literary sources, incorporating accounts taken from the great poets of the Renaissance? Did not the great mediæval sequences of tales grow up in exactly the same way? And what can be more mediæval than the *exposé* given

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* The *contastorie* of Palermo should, as Dr. Pitrè points out, not be confused with the *cantastione* of Naples, who read, expound and comment Tasso and Ariosto to the people.

Dr. Pitrè by Maestro Salvatore Ferreri, a famous Palermitan *contastorie*, of the order and sequence of his prodigious cycle, which took eighteen months in the telling; "it is all a matter of heredity (*eredità*) beginning with Constantine the Great, his son Fioro, then Fiorillo, then Fieravante; Fieravante begets Giberto; Giberto, Michele; Michele, Luigi; Luigi, Pipino; Pipino, Carlotto Magno (*sic*), and here there is a stop and this heredity ends with Roncesvalles." Then another genealogical line begins, including a certain Sinilbaldo, the father of "Sta. Rosalia, our protectress," and others. (As to Charlemagne, Maestro Salvatore knew for certain that he was born in A.D. 1014 and lived one hundred and forty years, but lost heart after Roncesvalles.)

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If circumstances prevented me from studying the survivals of chivalry at first hand, either at the *opra* or from the lips of the *contastorie*, I was better off with regard to an old mediæval miracle play in a rough and ready form—and indeed greatly favoured by circumstances.

Mediæval in spirit if not literally. There are no records or traces of Sicilian miracle plays earlier than the *Atto della Pinta* of 1543, a learned, clerkly and thoroughly Renaissance production, more spectacular than dramatic. Other "Sacred Representations" followed, mostly written by priests. Some of these found so much favour that they were given repeatedly all over Sicily and finally actually passed into the domain of oral tradition on the marionette theatres—such are some of the strands of which the queer web of folklore is woven! The *Mortorio di Christo* given at the *opra* during Passion Week, as they give Nativity Plays during Christmas Week, is still recognisable as based on the work of one Orioles, who was alive in 1746.

The earliest mention in the Sicilian records of what we should now call mysteries or miracle plays of a popular nature, is an edict of 1553, forbidding their representation as full of abuses and a profanation of the sacred precincts. This in itself is enough to show that they were old; repeated edicts threatening with excommunication and imprisonment show that they were ineradicable. As far as I know these edicts cannot be put in direct connection with any of the plays now surviving. Of these it may be said that they, like the spring flowers, have no history; they simply occur again every spring.

⁂

It should be noted that there are several different and most interesting forms of pantomimic and dramatic representations still connected with the great festivals on Saints' days in Sicily, helping to prove that representations like that of the *Madonna delle Milizie* at Scicli are not fossilised survivals, artificially kept up, but broken fragments of a living tradition. I can here mention only a few, referring the student to Dr. Pitrè's admirable books on the subject. In some places they are an incident of the procession. On St. Joseph's Day, for instance, the Christ child mounted on a donkey, with Joseph and Mary, wanders about seeking for shelter and finding none, until finally an innkeeper in the piazza takes pity on them. But soon after some wealthy travellers arrive on their mules with much jingling of bells and calls for mine host. The doors of the inn are suddenly thrown open, and the Holy Family driven out with blows—to make room for these more important guests—among the weeping and compassionate crowd collected, until finally an artisan (who represents the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, who run the show), appears on the scene, recognises Joseph, and carries the *Santuzzi*, as they are called, off to supper. In Roccamena this is amplified to a regular miracle play, with a rough stage in the piazza, on which the *Santuzzi* mount and prepare to sit down to a feast when they are suddenly assailed, at a signal from a dreadful ruffian who is lying in wait, by mounted robbers, and only saved by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, descending as a dove, and announcing that this is St. Joseph, when they disperse and the *Santuzzi* are carried off to a real banquet. (A banquet to the poor, or food given to the poor, sometimes in a street gaily dressed up for the occasion, is a standing feature of the celebration of St. Joseph.) In other places there is, or was, a regular pantomimic Dance of Death, with devils with horns who seize hold of those among the crowd marked by Death with his arrow, and drag them along willy-nilly and not very gently, until the Virgin Mary appears surrounded by angels, the captives are set free, and the devils dragged along in chains by an angel. Very charming must have been the Nativity Play until recently performed in Chiaramonte, on a stage outside the church, representing a cave where appropriate songs (written in Sicilian by one of the people) were sung by the angels, the Madonna (a lullaby) and the Three Wise Men, while the shepherds approached to the sound of their bagpipes. Nor must the *jocu* or *intrillazzata* of Troina be forgotten, though now recently, I believe, fallen into disuse. It is, or was, a long elaborate play, with many personages, dealing with some legend or episode of Bible history, entirely made up out of his own head by some illiterate peasant poet, and by him passed on *viva voce* to equally illiterate rustic actors.

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The *Madonna delle Milizie*, as at present given on the Saturday which comes two weeks before Easter, represents a blend of dramatic, lyric, and pantomimic elements. Scicli is a town of 12,000 inhabitants, on the railway, but quite off the beaten track and still very conservative. The inhabitants almost exclusively consist of three great land-owning families, the contract farmers, tenant farmers and farm hands of their enormous estates, and the intermediate class which always grows up, of Government employés, local lawyers, caterers, small shopkeepers or pedlars and the like. Scicli belongs to the Sicilian type of rural community, where we must look for the Sicilian peasantry —and the Sicilian landlords. There are in Sicily no manor houses or châteaux, surrounded by gardens and outhouses of the home farm, and only in exceptional cases anything answering to the large rural Tuscan villas, with their delightful *fattorie*. Some of the wealthier among these people own villas, sometimes several villas, where they go for a change at suitable seasons, but the official residence of the estate is always a palace, generally a very imposing, ancient palace on the main street or piazza of a town, without as much as a hanging garden or a terrace, like those that charm one in small Tuscan towns. The land is all let, generally to contract farmers (*conduttori*) who sublet it to others.

Scicli is still clerical and wealthy; it boasts a large charitable institution known as the Opera Pia Busacca and several churches, two rather fine, with several large, very handsome pieces of old silver (made in Scicli), such as caskets and crucifixes, and some of the very finest ecclesiastical vestments in sixteenth-century Genoese gold brocade that I have ever seen.

Such then was the *milieu*, as rural in Sicily as a village green in Old England with the towers of the manor visible among the trees of the park in the background. There are smaller communities, no doubt, *casali* or villages, but that is only an accident of agglomeration. In some districts, especially where oranges and lemons are grown, the peasantry live scattered; in nearly all agricultural and pastoral districts they live agglomerated; and very often the fields are so far off that the men only come home on Saturdays. Scicli, like many Sicilian towns, is an agglomeration of several units of the kind, where the people—the authors and performers of our miracle play—are as "rustic" as an old-time English hind, though cottage gardens are unknown.*

⁂

The miracle represented at Scicli happened during the Arabo-Norman wars when the Normans were near to being routed by the Saracens at Donna Lucata, when suddenly there appeared in the sky a woman on a fiery white charger, wearing a royal crown, dressed in glittering armour, and brandishing a gleaming sword—and the Saracens fled incontinent. It is a purely popular legend handed on by oral tradition, of which the earliest literary mention is an explanatory comment to an allusion in a poem from 1667:

> "A Scichili li Turchi e li Cristiani,"

which the commentators explain thus: "Per la festa della Gran Signora delli Milici a Scichili fanno una excellentissima rappresentatione de la guerra infra li Sarachini e li Christiani con multo frutto spirituale e grandioso concurso di tutta la comarca."

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* In a community of this description there is no call for even a modest inn, nor would a stray foreign woman at an inn have been able to gather any impressions of importance. Fortunately Sicilian hospitality and kindliness still survive in the most courteous and exquisite of forms and, introduced by a mutual friend, I was made cordially welcome in one of the seigneurial families and given every information by a well-informed and scholarly local historian.

Dating from about the same period, according to a good judge of style in Scicli, there is also a commemorative medal in bronze with the Madonna and Child on one side and Count Roger on the other, and this legend : *Maria mater Rogerius comes* 1091. Our festa was thus a well-established and probably ancient fact in the seventeenth century. The legend, represented or not represented, must have grown up much earlier, before all living memory of the fights between Normans and Arabs had died out. There are several similar legends in Sicily—one at Messina—but in a more confused and broken form.

The festa begins on the Friday (or Thursday). The various pieces of the statue, now kept in different places—the horse and the "Turks" are in the Chiesa Madrice, the Madonna (in pieces) is taken care of by the Congregation of Charity—are then brought out, put together, dressed in sumptuous clothes, and carried round in procession to three or four churches—and finally left to attend High Mass in the Madrice, where I had an opportunity of examining it. It is a well-carved statue or rather group, by a good artist, of painted wood of huge size. The Madonna wears a curly black wig with a gilt crown, a scaly bodice imitating armour, in silver-grey and white, a divided skirt of pretty rose-coloured brocade with a charming eighteenth-century border embroidered in silver. From her shoulders there hangs a blue satin mantle, embroidered in gold, given recently by a lady of Scicli for a miracle vouchsafed to her. One of the two Turks trampled underfoot by her charger has a very dark face, but a regular Chinese pigtail.

After noon on the Saturday the real representation begins. The Madonna is taken round again, provoking boundless enthusiasm. The two rival armies parade the streets amid much cheering and firing off of old blunderbusses. The Normans are on horseback on sorry old nags, clad in cast-off uniforms, Count Roger wearing a helmet. It is the Turks that come by sea, in a handsome galley, unmistakably eighteenth-century, with their chieftain, Belcane, seated, proud and impressive, in the poop, on a throne under a canopy on four columns. He wears a long, open cloth jacket, embroidered, a fancy turban, very imposing, and smokes a huge pipe reaching nearly to his feet: His page or esquire is gaudily dressed in shabby red velvet. All the other Turks now wear made-up costumes composed of white shirt and trousers, gay striped woollen sashes and fancy turban-helmets, made of cardboard and coloured tissue-paper, with long streamers in many colours, supposed to represent the "tails" of the pashas. They all have blackened faces, look very fierce, and fire off their muskets continually.

Watching a disjointed parade, even when comfortably installed on a palace balcony, is always slow work, and wearisome. So I was doubly glad to make use of the opportunity for quietly studying the costumes of all who passed during the waits. A certain number of the men still wore clothes of heavy, old-fashioned cut, and caps, not hats; all the women, without exception, wore the beautiful long mantle of finest dark blue cloth, here trimmed with black velvet, put on as a border all round, and a pretty cut openwork device in the two angles. This coat is cut in a true semicircle, drawn well over the head, yet worn coquettishly over a silk handkerchief thrown loosely over the hair, so that the dark faces with the flashing eyes are framed in becoming rims of lemon-colour, pale pink, or blue. It is never pinned or fastened, only held together. When the women stopped to talk, the mantle was allowed to hang down straight (never slipping off as it would do from our unaccustomed heads), thus affording me glimpses of the spring finery worn under it, in pretty, bright, rather delicate tints, but made in "the (modern) fashion," and differing mainly from the dress of a hatless and coatless village maiden anywhere, in the courage of their colour-sense, so to say, so that these rather ill-made blouses and skirts with the ample apron and stole-like kerchief were transformed into four full notes of pleasant spring-like colour ; say pastel blue, pale yellow, lilac, and pink. There was no attempt at the harmonious co-ordination that delights one in neo-Campania ; yet, set off as they were by the rich blue of the cloaks, the effect was charming. I noticed a few old costumes made rather like the well-known ones from Piana dei Greci, with wide puffs hanging down from the elbows—resembling those generally worn only recently. These were all of glistening silk and linen, the pleated skirt very full, bodice and skirt always of the same material, golden brown or bright green in colour, with a silk apron of another colour.

At last it was announced that the *battaglia* had begun and that it was time for me to be taken there. The *battaglia* takes place on the present outskirts of Scicli on a kind of natural arena in a hollow (I think an old limestone quarry or pit), with gentle slopes and little grassy, broken hillocks all round, now thickly covered with people, the men all crowding as near the *battaglia* as possible, to the very edge of the pit, the women clustering on the hillocks. I was found a coign of vantage, and even a chair, on one of the mounds and had a fine view of the stage, especially when I got up on the chair.

This was simply a rough board structure raised high from the ground and railed in, and now occupied by the Turks; Belcane seated, still smoking and still impassive. Some of the preliminary parleyings were going on; Belcane refusing stolidly to give up Sicily to the Normans at the bidding of Roger. Then Roger, a handsome, elderly man, with a long blond beard, appears personally, at the head of the steep flight of steps, and summons Belcane in a high and mighty tone to give up the island or—brandishing his sword. Belcane at first remains impassive, but soon jumps up from his throne and brandishes his scimitar in Roger's face in reply to his menaces. I could not either catch or follow the dialogue, but never have I seen anything more irresistibly comical than these two actors hurling abuse at one another, like pellets, with their arms down their sides, then suddenly, when they had said their say, raising their right arm and shaking their sword or scimitar fiercely. Some of the dialogue was evidently very funny as it set all the audience laughing and applauding in the most riotous way.

This dialogue is entirely a peasant production, no one knows when written or by whom, handed on by purely oral tradition, the same year after year—the leading parts always taken by the same actors, chosen for their suitable types. Even the street urchins are always playing at Roger and Belcane, with such fragments of the dialogue as they can recollect—yet certain slight modifications and admissions of new matter show it to be really a living thing. In the fragments printed by Sicilian students it is indescribably funny, at first mock-heroic—as when Roger in one place informs Belcane that they, the Normans, are no longer alone; doesn't Belcane know that in Italy there are his colleagues Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi? I don't know if this boast is still kept up; one of the favourite sallies nowadays is Belcane's reproach, that Roger has not been able to prevent the "annexation" of Sicily by Italy (unpopular in Sicily).

All this and more took time, and my attention wandered to the landscape and the audience, especially the audience—this eager, delighted, open-air audience—to whom this was the great event of the year, thronging all the natural steps of this natural amphitheatre as in the days long gone by. The women had all thrown off their cloaks and now seemed like large spreading flower-beds of living, moving, exquisitely tinted spring flowers—warm purple-lilac predominating as it does in the Sicilian wild flowers.

The site had a weird beauty of its own, too severe for mere loveliness, like the bony Sikelian features all around me . . . Modern Scicli hidden behind the tall bluff of the Rocca, more bold than beautiful, dominating the scene . . . ; the billowing line of hillocks of the natural theatre broken by the group of roofs, tower and cypresses of the old convent of the Capuchins, surmounting a luxuriant garden full of the perfume of roses, the only flower garden in Scicli . . . ; down to the left, a straight gorge or defile, of natural limestone terraces, studded with the big dark blobs of the carob-trees, very austere as to line, very dark and white as to colour, and, at the end of these two parallel walls, raised up high on poles, three angels with widespread wings in effective relief against the westering sky, turning first luminous gold, then copper gilt, at the end of a cloudless spring day.

Meanwhile menaces had degenerated into vituperation, the two parties had declared war, and a wild fight had ensued (on the plain at the foot of the stage), where the Normans, as in the legend, are near to being routed, when they are suddenly saved by the miraculous intervention of the mounted Madonna, who disperses the Saracens and proceeds down the defile, escorted by the Normans, and saluted by the angels, who bow down reverently three times to greet her, while another angel, on a raised platform, a real living chorister boy, sings a beautiful old hymn. A hush falls over the people as his young voice floats up through the valley, in the mystic intense hour of the afterglow.

And with this impression, I would fain end this book. When dealing with the Middle Ages, we must never forget that behind all the grotesque illiteracy, rude merry-making and gross superstition, as behind the keen, clear-sighted activity of the few, the long-suffering patience of the many, all the other contrasting aspects of the Middle Ages, sordid, brilliant, material, or stirring, there was this intense mystic glow.

LIST OF BOOKS RECOMMENDED

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive in any way. I have limited myself to indicating briefly the principal authorities and sources of information, also some of the more important and suggestive works recently published. Further indications will be found in those books themselves, or in the long Bibliographical Lists published in the "Cicerone for Sicily," written by Mauceri and Agati for the Casa Reber, which being excellent and up to date will be in the hands of all students.

For convenience of reference I have grouped the matter under the headings of: I. History of Art; II. Social History and Folklore. Nearly all the books mentioned bear in some way on the neighbouring branches of the subject, and should be consulted for them.

I. HISTORY OF ART

Zimmermann M. Gg.: "Sizilien." Bd. II. Palermo. [Leipzig, 1905.]

Diehl: "Palerme et Syracuse." [Paris, 1907.]

Both useful, especially for their careful discussion of the mosaics. The book by Diehl, brilliant, careless, full of slips of the pen or the memory, a typical production for a "series," is, however, full of fine art appreciations, and is of value as giving the views of an authority on Byzantine Mosaics. The finest and most judicious pages on Sicilian art are those written for Olivier L.: "En Sicile, Guide du savant et du touriste" [Paris, 1902], by Octave Join-Lambert. There are also chapters dealing with Sicilian art in Diehl: "L'art byzantin dans l'Italie méridionale" ["Bibliothèque internationale de l'art," Paris, 1894]; and Bertaux: "L'art dans l'Italie méridionale." Tome premier. [Paris, 1904.] The two volumes on Romanesque art in Venturi's big "Storia dell' Arte

Italiana," so full of varied information and interesting suggestion, are inadequate and disappointing in the chapters dealing with Sicilian art, though not entirely lacking in the suggestive quality never absent from the work of this astounding pioneer. The first scholarly essay, now somewhat antiquated, on Sicilian art was **Anton Springer**'s "Die Mittelalterliche Kunst in Palermo. Bilder aus der neuern Kunstgeschichte." Erster Band. [Bonn, 1886.] The two excellent articles in the *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* by A. **Pavloski**, on the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina (vol. ii.), and by **Paolo Orsi** on the little Byzantine churches near Syracuse (vol. vii.), also A. **Goldschmidt**'s fine monograph on "Die normannischen Königspaläste in Palermo," *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen*, 1898, have been amply made use of in my book. **Di Marzo**: "La Pittura in Palermo nel Rinascimento" [Palermo, 1899], is a careful and critical work full of original research. The "Storia delle Belle Arti in Sicilia," by the same writer, written about fifty years ago, has been suppressed by the learned author as too uncritical. Articles by G. **Patricolo** and A. **Salinas** in the "Archivio Storico Siciliano," should also be referred to.

Of older "standard" works there is a good English publication and a really fine French one, but both now antiquated, viz.:

Gally Knight: "Saracenic and Norman Remains to illustrate the Normans in Sicily." [1840.]

Girault de Prangey: "Essai sur l'Architectures des Arabes en Espagne, en Sicile et en Barbarie." [Paris, 1841.]

Also two large Sicilian monographs in folio:

Serradifalco: "Del Duomo di Monreale e di altre chiese siculo-normanne." [Palermo, 1838.]

Gravina: "Il Duomo di Monreale." [Palermo, 1859.]

The large monograph on the "Cappella Palatina" is recent in date, but not in treatment.

FOR COLLATERAL READING

W. R. **Lethaby**: "Mediæval Art." [London, Duckworth.]

Stanley Lane-Poole: "Saracenic Arts" (Unfortunately out of print).

H. **Saladin**: "Manuel d'Art Musulman: Architecture." [Paris, Picard, 1906.] The only recent handbook; profusely illustrated.

G. Migeon: "Manuel d'Art Musulman: Les Arts Plastiques et Industriels." [Paris, Picard, 1907.]

II. SOCIAL HISTORY, INSTITUTIONS AND FOLKLORE

Amari: "Storia dei Musulmani in Sicilia." [Firenze, 1868.]

Amari: "Biblioteca Arabo-sicula." [Torino, 1880–1889.]

Schiaparelli: "Ibn Gubayr; Viaggio in Ispagna, Sicilia, Siria e Palestina, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egitto." [Roma, 1906.]

For Vincenzo di Giovanni: "La Topografia Antica di Palermo dal Secolo X al XV." [Palermo, 1889–1890. *Vide* Preface.]

"Archivio Storico Siciliano." [Nuova serie. Palermo, 1876 ff.]

Siragusa: "Pietro de Eboli Liber ad honorem Augusti." [Roma, 1905, con tavole.] Gives reproductions in folio of the miniatures showing the characteristic garb of 1189 of all ranks and classes of men. There are also some women, publicly mourning the king (Will. II.), one of them tearing her hair. All the various costumes and even types are differentiated. Little traits of keen observation abound, as in the portrayal of the lanky Arab musicians, clashing their cymbals and blowing their long tabors at the triumphal entry of Tancred. These miniatures are, however, probably not by a Sicilian hand. The author, Pietro de Eboli, was a clerk from Salerno. The representations of buildings are entirely conventional.

A. F. Kendrick: "Sicilian Woven Fabrics." [*Magazine of Fine Arts*, 1905.]

Catterina Bonetti Vertua: "I Merletti Siciliani."

Garufi: "Ricerche sugli Usi Nuziali nel Mediaevo in Sicilia" (con documenti inediti). [Palermo, 1897.]

Garufi: "I Documenti Inediti dell' Epoca Normanna in Sicilia." Parte I. [Palermo, 1899.]

Garufi: "Catalogo illustrato del Tabulario di S. Maria Nuova in Monreale." [Palermo, 1902.] All three are very useful and suggestive.

Chalandon: "Histoire de la Domination normande en Italie et en Sicile." [Paris, 1907.] Has two chapters on Land Tenure, from which I have drawn largely, and a useful Bibliographical Introduction.

Caspar: "Roger II. (1101–1154) u. die Gründung der Normann-Sicilischen Monarchie," [Innsbruck, 1904], gives a list of all the deeds issued by Roger II.

LIST OF BOOKS RECOMMENDED

Kehr (Karl Andreas): "Die Urkünden der Normannisch Sicilischen Könige." [Innsbruck, 1902.]

Salamone-Marino, G.: "Costumi ed Usanze dei Contadini di Sicilia." [Palermo, 1807.]

Pitrè, G.: "Biblioteca delle Tradizioni Siciliane." [Palermo, 1872–1904.] 22 vols. (A new illustrated edition is forthcoming.)

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